

Killing Time: A Relational Theory of Homeless Addiction

Joshua Burraway

University College London (UCL)

Anthropology

I, Joshua Burraway confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Abstract

Based on fourteen months of fieldwork in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, this thesis explores the tragic relational and temporal complexities of homeless addiction in the context of late liberalism. Historically speaking, the majority of research on homelessness relates to discussions of public policy and “service access,” with the primary focus on macroeconomic factors. Furthermore, within this scholarly milieu, the question of addiction has typically been relegated to the periphery, acknowledged as a taken-for-granted condition or “driver” of homelessness, but rarely explored as an existential, political or ethical phenomenon in its own right.

Notable exceptions within anthropology are Desjarlais’ (1997) study of a Boston shelter along with Bourgois and Schonberg’s (2011) photoethnography of San Francisco’s homeless heroin users. In both cases, the homeless body is conceived at once as the locus and the instrument of political power, capricious and abjectifying though it may be. This thesis represents an extension of these seminal ideas, conceiving the homeless-addicted body as neither diseased, pathological nor singular, but as a plural body in ceaseless melancholic transition between different forms of being.

In a critical departure from the biomedical model of addiction, this thesis takes as its analytical focus the drug-induced blackout. For the homeless, the blackout is a time in which they become “somebody else.” The existential mechanics of the blackout – in which the vacuum left by the dissolution of memory is filled by the emergence of a new concealed presence – provide an alternative means of thinking through the complex entanglement between memory, loss, temporality, agency and discipline in late-liberalism. Operating through an alternative temporal economy to the one laid down by capitalism (where time is *killed* rather than spent) the blacked-out body is thus also a black-market body; one that forces us to confront our most taken-for-granted everyday conventions.

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‘Any meaning is better than no meaning at all.’

- **Nietzsche**

Chapter One: Introduction

Keeping Moving

The Thames is in a foul mood today, a mischievous easterly gale winding up the water's surface like nobody's business. The river's hackles rise and then break under the wind's relentless teasing, the top layer of water abducted by the swirling currents and then whipped face-first into the few unfortunate souls who dare to brave the river's squally banks. The water slaps our cheeks like an open-palm covered in tiny needles, freezing cold and unspeakably vicious. Lenny and I have been walking for almost an hour now, diligently hugging the river's bank as it meanders its way slowly towards the Thames Estuary and then into the biting waters of the North Sea. There is no particular destination in mind, our footsteps as hungry for time as they are for space. I suggest walking further up from the bank, closer to the many edificial wind-shields that line London's coronary artery. Lenny is not so keen, preferring to stick to less populated areas. For Lenny, protection from people is just as important as shelter from the elements – elements that are out in full force this afternoon.

Lenny has kind eyes set against high bearded cheekbones that often seem to smile even when his mouth does not. However, it is above all fatigue that has come to define his gaze of late, these kind eyes leaden and puffy with exhaustion, caught in a sleep debt that seems to be spiralling ever more out of control. His beard is wiry and unkempt, his lips cracked like the desiccated lesions of a sunburnt riverbed. Though half-way through his sixties, Lenny's shoulders remain broad and robust, a valuable quality when you have to carry your entire life in a single rucksack. Though born and raised in the UK, his father was an Afrikaner raised on a diet of farming and rugby, the genetic legacy of which can be seen not only in Lenny's broadness of back, but also in his dinner-plate hands and tree-trunk calves. In any other situation, Lenny's towering stature and physical presence would radiate strength and self-assurance. Walking by the river though, the day-to-day realities of Lenny's homelessness have ruthlessly eaten away at this natural presence, reducing whatever aura he might once have had to the dull ache of

lumpen misery. In no way fit for long distance trekking, his boots – acquired via a clothing hand-out at a local day centre – are at least half a size too small and riddled with holes. Lenny's day always begins well before dawn, the slightest sound guaranteed to jolt him from a sleep so shallow that he is lucky to get even three hours per night. For a week or so he had found a somewhat quiet area around the back of a hospital in which to bed down, near enough an air vent to remain mostly dry. This little oasis was short-lived however, hospital security moving them on and then hosing down the ground on a nightly basis so as to make the area unfit for sleeping. On waking the only thing to do is walk, and keep walking until the Manna Centre,¹ a small privately funded day-centre located in the heart of London Bridge, opens its doors at 7am. Only then can Lenny finally get off his swollen and blistered feet, sit down, and take in some much needed calories. Here he can find some respite from the wind, from the indifference from strangers, and from the daily violence of the streets:

'When you're walking down the street, you feel like a ghost, barely even anyone notices you exist. And when people do notice you, they look at you like you're a piece of shit on the bottom of their shoe. Weekends are the worst, especially when everyone gets out the pub. I've been kicked, spat on, food thrown at me. Woke up once and some bloke was even trying to piss on me. It's unbelievable how people treat the homeless.'

Lenny tries to see the osteopathic consultant whenever possible during clinic hours at the Manna. Constantly on the move, his feet are in a truly sorry state, the ill-fitting boots and sodden leather giving him the kind of problems that wouldn't look out of place in the trenches. His weight in freefall, the jeans he is wearing are almost comically

¹ *The Manna* is a decidedly urban configuration, shaped by and embedded within an interlocking web of diverse social and political trajectories; a place where strangers of the most socially marginal kind are brought together under one roof. As well as providing advice services and basic medical care, the Manna was fundamentally a place to rest, to wash and to eat. Whilst the amenities available were hardly five-star, they were as clean and functional as one could expect from such a small-scale charitable institution, the six showers servicing some one hundred-and-twenty people each day. I came to understand the Manna as a constellatory arrangement of social relationships, converging from different arcs into a single locus (Massey 1994), a container for the interweaving of divergent and multidimensional narratives of displacement, or as Brah puts it: 'an entanglement of the genealogies of dispersion' (1991:181).

oversized, held up by a length of rope that looks as resilient as his boots and about as sturdy. Lenny is told unequivocally by the attending consultant that he needs to stop walking so much if his feet are to stand any chance of recovering, that at the very least he needs to find a new pair of shoes. Lenny accepts the advice with one hand only to disregard it with the other:

'They say I've got to get off my feet, stop walking so much. Or else my feet are gonna get even worse, like I'm gonna need surgery and all that. They say I need new boots, that these one's aren't designed for all the walking I'm doing. I mean yea, fair enough. My feet are fuckin' killing me, and getting new bandages on each week here is a blessing. But where the fuck am I gonna get the money for new shoes? I've got barely enough to make it through the day as it is. What do they expect me to do? I walk here in the mornings, eat as much as I can, you know, trying to pack on the calories. I tell you, I've lost so much weight, down to almost twelve stone. I just can't seem to get enough calories down me, to keep my weight up, y'know? I should be at least three stone heavier, at least! But I don't have a choice, I've got to keep walking. When this place closes at lunchtime what else do I have to do? Can't go to sleep yet, wouldn't be able to anyway, too many people around. Plus, I've got to keep my bag with me, or else someone'll just fucking nick it. Just like they did with them jeans you given me last week. Only thing I can do is keep moving, keep out of people's way, out of trouble, keep my eye out for a new place to skip. Thing is I'm fuckin' wasting away at the moment, y'know? At this rate I'll be dead by the end of the month, just another number.'

I met Lenny the very first day he came into the Manna Centre, a space in which I would carry out a sizeable portion of the ethnographic fieldwork that forms the backbone of this thesis. Lenny fell into homelessness following the sudden death of his partner from a heart attack, a woman who was also his *de facto* landlord. Despite living in the property for over fifteen years, Lenny had no official proof of his tenancy. Owing to a severely fractured relationship with his partner's daughter, and with no surviving family of his own, Lenny found himself evicted from his home within a matter of days, forced to sleep rough even on the night of his partner's funeral. With nowhere to sleep and

nowhere to go, Lenny began to walk, his endless footsteps the only thing able to carry him through the night, devoid of direction or destination. Getting to know Lenny was like seeing structural violence in motion, a front-row-seat to the way in which life on the streets mutates from a condemnation at first into a tragic home unto itself. Despite the ongoing shock at his partner's passing in combination with the obvious fatigue, arriving at the Manna on that first day Lenny remained hopeful that he would find a way out of his situation. However, as with any other kind of trapdoor, climbing back out is significantly harder than falling through.

First and foremost, Lenny's condition as a rough sleeper needed to be confirmed and registered by the local authorities, the front line of which are London's various street outreach teams. This meant Lenny needed to stay put in a fixed location over the course of several nights so that the team would know where to find him (as and when their already over-stretched schedule allowed it). However, in a situation that shone a powerful light on the dissonance in lived temporalities between homeless people and the institutions put in place to assist them, it quickly became clear that Lenny's timetable and that of Southwark's outreach team were wildly out of sync. As far as Lenny was concerned, staying in a "fixed" location for any extended period of time was neither practical nor possible, the precarity of his situation rarely allowing to him to settle in a given place for more than a couple of days. In an ironic twist that was not lost on Lenny himself, it appeared as if the motile realities of his homelessness were the very thing keeping him from finding a way out it. After several weeks amounting to an extended game of cat-and-mouse, the outreach team eventually ran into Lenny whilst out looking for another rough sleeper, offering to take him to a government-funded rehousing hub in West London (part of the No Second Night Out [NSNO] initiative²). However, on finding out of about the cramped living conditions within the hub, in conjunction with

² One of Boris Johnson's flagship mayoral initiatives, the programme's principle aim/claim is that all clients that are picked up off the street are to be re-housed within a seventy-two-hour period. Their success rate at hitting this particular target seemed to vary wildly depending on the unique and singular needs of the clients they had under their watch/control. Some could be gone in a day; others would be there for weeks or even months. In any case, the 72-hour claim seemed to be more exception than rule.

the amount of time he would likely have to remain there for before being potentially rehoused, Lenny decided that this was a leap of faith he simply couldn't make:

"They finally tracked me down, told me we were going to some kind of half-way house down Shepherd's Bush. Then they told me about the place, sharing a room with twenty-two other blokes! No beds or anything, just blankets on the floor, not allowed to leave at any point. Said I might be there for weeks, even months. I can't do that, live in such a cramped space with all those other people; it'd lose my nut. Said I'd rather stay out here. Told No Second Night Out to fuck off."

Over the first few weeks of my field work I spent some time working in this very rehousing hub, eventually severing ties when it became clear that the bureaucracy intrinsic to such a large state-funded institution was going to make it practically impossible foster any kind of meaningful relationships with the various people passing through its doors. By way of example, since I was technically classified as a "volunteer," it was more or less bureaucratically axiomatic that I could not be "directly responsible" for any decisions involving clients. This classification, whether I liked it or not, instilled within me a form of moral distance, an invitation to keep the clients at arm's length, to let "the professionals" handle it. The hub itself is divided into separate "staff" and "client" areas by a vast glass partition, ensuring that the staff remain "visible" to the clients whilst also remaining fundamentally disconnected. Looking out into the client area through the glass wall in the staff office it was impossible to shake off an almost zoological sense of voyeurism. The client area is markedly Spartan in its selection of amenities, intentional on the part of the management as a means of differentiating the space from that of a hostel, reinforcing its inherent sense of permanent impermanence. As one of the staff tells me early on: *'we don't want them to get too comfortable here.'* As Lenny's personal reaction to the prospect of an extended stay proved, she needn't have worried.

Given Lenny's ongoing sense of despair with the realities of street living, it is tempting to view his refusal to accept help from the outreach team as tempestuous to the point of being foolhardy, perhaps evoking the old idiom of "beggars can't be choosers."

However, his rejection of the terms offered must be set against Lenny's personal life history, five years of which were spent locked up in a psychiatric institution where Lenny claims to have been singled out and abused by the hospital's staff. Whilst Lenny was reticent to go into many of the finer details of his time on the ward, what he spoke most patently about to me was the ongoing sense of claustrophobia, the psychic distress of being under lock and key, along with the omnipresent fear that he might be attacked at any moment. The point is that due to certain disturbing events in his past, Lenny harbours a deep resentment and distrust to institutional authority, especially when confronted with prospect of living in a single room choc-a-bloc with other men, or else handing over his fate into the hands of unseen "staff members" who lurk behind locked doors:

'I'm tellin' ya, going to that place would be just like going back on the ward...All those people, nowhere to go, nowhere to keep to yourself. Plus, you can't get out if you want to stay on the housing list. I'd basically be stuck in there for god knows how long...trapped. No thank you I said to them. I'd rather take my chances out here. Even though I wouldn't give it, this situation, to my worst enemy. That place just isn't an option for me.'

The subtle nuances and tragic complexities of Lenny's personal history meant that the NSNO proposal was essentially a non-starter from the beginning, the setback causing him to embed himself deeper and deeper into the day-to-day rhythms of street living. Having slipped through the government's already porous institutional safety-net (not once but twice), Lenny eventually formed a collective "skip" with a few other guests from the Manna Centre, continuing to spend his days aimlessly pounding London's pavements, in the evenings finding solace and refuge in the bottle:

'Ever since I've been out here I've found myself back on the drink. Was never much of a drinker before all this happened, now it seems like I'm a full blown alkie! What else am I gonna do though? You've gotta have a bit to drink in the evening...kills the time I guess. Takes you out of the situation for a bit. Gives you a break from all this shit.'

Being Homeless in Late Liberal London: The Death of the Flâneur

This thesis is about people like Lenny, about those who dwell so close to society's fissures that the threat of freefall is always just around the corner. It is about how the ongoing breakdown of a person's intimate lifeworld in conjunction with their simultaneous dislocation from the flow of "normal" time and social structures creates a temporality in which time is no longer spent but *killed*. This thesis has therefore concerned itself with certain key questions:

What are the existential and material conditions that constitute homeless being? To what extent is addiction, as a state-of-being, a political manifestation of a homeless person's socio-economic abandonment? What is the role of the body in the articulation of these politics? Can homeless-addiction be re-conceptualised in relational, rather than pathological, terms? Can certain forms extreme intoxication, approached henceforth as an alternative modalities-of-being, be said to possess an intrinsic temporality? What does homeless-addiction tell us about the state of urban existence in late-liberalism³?

We see Lenny being embodying a number of these questions, framing his newfound desire for alcohol as an adaptive response to the alienating conditions of his homelessness, emphasising above all its capacity to help him *transcend*⁴ his situation

³ For purposes relating to the analytic scope of this thesis, I have chosen the term "late-liberalism" over its more modish cousin - "neoliberalism." This choice has been made specifically to echo the distinction put forward by Elizabeth Povinelli, as a means of capturing the historicity of liberal ideology, from its emergence in the 1960s to its mutation into the specific form of power we see today. Povinelli defines this mutation as 'the twined formations of neoliberalism and liberal cultural recognition' (2011:31). As the congealment of particular power relations, late-liberalism is constituted by an internal value system that works to simultaneously legitimise and disguise the intrinsic instability of the socio-economic systems that prop up the "global order." In other words, late-liberal ideology acts as a security blanket by rearticulating how the individual and society relate to one another, ignoring peripheral voices of dissent and instead focusing on *managing* the (in)stability of the system by endorsing certain cultural and economic models over others, ensuring that the flow of value always moves upstream, from subordinate to dominant groups.

⁴ The concept of the transcendental has a muddled and oftentimes perplexing history, especially within the domain of philosophy. In what is now framed as a classic correspondence on the topic, Jean-Paul Sartre (1980) and Martin Heidegger (1993) offer up competing notions of the transcendental, the former suggesting it is through the human capacity to "self-surpass," to invent and move beyond him/herself through transcendent pursuits/actions, that the human being constitutes his existence. Heidegger, on the other hand, suggests that the transcendental is always already there, that existence is produced through the unfolding of the human essence, that Being *is* the transcendens; "pure and simple," as he puts it. This

and “kill time” – even if only for a little while. Indeed, Lenny’s framing of his drinking as a necessary means of “breaking” with the normal rhythms of everyday life has plenty in common with the existential imperative of escape put forward by Emmanuel Levinas: ‘the need to get out of oneself, that is, to break the most radical and unalterably binding of chains...*to break the chains of the I to the self*’ (2003:55). It is precisely this notion of self-exile, this deeply ingrained need for escape, that I intend to bring to the surface of anthropological inquiry; specifically through the context of homeless addiction. I examine the shared existential conditions and ontological⁵ tensions that constitute the need for transcendental measures, as well as the political, medical and moral structures that have arisen to control and restrict them. Ultimately, my aim is to demonstrate how the desire for anaesthetic oblivion⁶ through drugs and alcohol constitutes an embodied response to the politics of our time, characterised by certain shared conditions of vulnerability from which have emerged an un-conventional new set of ethical, relational, and temporal imperatives.

Critically, I will be embedding these ideas squarely within the national context of the United Kingdom, acutely aware that the interrelated dynamics between homelessness and addiction presented here are by no means universal. Indeed, the form and structure of homelessness varies greatly both across and within societies, its configurations changing considerably based on differences in culture, economy, welfare policy, political stability, and even landscape and climate. The point is that “crossing the line” into homelessness in postsocialist Russia (Stephenson 2006) or Romania (O’Neill 2010) is by no means conflatable with the quotidian realities of “struggling along” in a Boston homeless shelter (Desjarlais 1994, 1997). Likewise, the “culture” of a New England

thesis possesses none of the time, space or inclination to stick much more than a toenail into this debate. However, for the sake of analytical and rhetorical clarity, as and when I refer to the notion of the transcendental, I will be using it as a means of describing the process by which selves “step-out” of their ontological boundaries, a definition that is closer to Levinas’ (2003) concept of *escape* than in its to the Sartre-Heidegger discussion.

⁵ For the purposes of this thesis, the “ontological” – a highly contested term in anthropological circles – concerns the conditions of possibility for existence, or, to quote Holbraad and Pedersen (2017:10): ‘the conditions pertaining to what things might be.’

⁶ The aim here to bring out not only the aporia of anaesthetic abyss but also to evoke the Latin *oblivionem*: “a state of being forgotten.”

soup kitchen (Glasser 1988) in the bleak midwinter is markedly distinct from the “culture” of homeless heroin users living under a San Francisco freeway (Bourgois and Schonberg 2011). Even within a given city, the “spaces of homelessness” (Jackson 2012, 2015; Ruddick 1990, 1996) are themselves highly divergent; the “compassionate” space of the day centre (Cloke et al. 2010) markedly different from the potentially violent corridors that constitute the public space beyond its walls (Crang 2000; Irwin et al. 1997; Newburn and Rock 2004). By the same token the social and political complexities of homelessness can also vary enormously across a given country’s rural-urban divide (Cloke et al. 2000; Stewart 1996; Vissing 1996).

With regards to the British context, any account of homelessness cannot ignore the disembowelment of the Ford-Keynesian regulatory state that began with Thatcherism, and the consequent torrent of late-liberal socioeconomic strategies that have shaped policies, partnerships, initiatives and regulatory practices designed to deal with issues of homelessness (Amster 2003; DeVerteuil 2006; DeVerteuil et al. 2009; Mitchell 1997; Povinelli 2010; Smith 1996b). Isobel Anderson (2004) states her case unequivocally, arguing that the explosion of rough sleepers beginning in the late 1980s remains one of the great social costs of the Thatcher era. Indeed, the spike in unemployment created by new working regulations in line with the “rolling-back” of the state from welfare responsibilities created something of a socio-economic black hole, giving shape to the spaces of homelessness that we continue to see today (Carlen 1996, Peck and Tickell 2002). The “Third Way” implemented by New Labour in the late ’90s did little to stem the tide started by Thatcher, insofar as their choice to “roll-out” late-liberal policies ultimately mirrored and accentuated the negative social effects of “rolling-back” social welfare. These roll-out policies have long since outlived the Labour government that championed them, their Thatcherite legacy since repackaged and now rearticulated through the class-stomping Austerity of (post)Cameronism. These historical forces have saturated the flesh of the body politic, creating a rising surge in homelessness that shows no signs of abating. The point is that the ideological tendrils of the Thatcherite era do not belong to the static realm of the relic, rather they rage into the present as a violent echo, as an ever-filling swamp of unfinished business, as destructive forces that wrap

themselves round the edges of the society thus formed – a society she infamously claimed never to have existed in the first place.

Whilst these forces have shaped the social, economic and political landscape in a distinctly British way, with London forming something of an epicentre for the nation's homeless crisis, they must be simultaneously understood as part of wider structural and ideological changes that are distinctly global. Thus while it remains true that configurations of homelessness certainly differ from place to place, we can perhaps approach the wider phenomenon itself as one point along a continuum of structural violence, as one particularly visceral embodiment along a scale of alienation and poverty that is intimately connected with broader socio-economic, political, material, and existential pressures (Biehl 2005; Bourgois and Schonberg 2009; Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004; Sandel 2012; Wacquant 2004, 2009).

In this sense, we can see the economic engine of the British nation-state as directly complicit within the current homeless crisis, in which more and more people are pushed into social and political purgatory. As the aberrations of a society that has effectively found them surplus to requirement, the homeless are forced to live within the brackets laid down to them by the dominant moral and temporal order, their daily life reduced to begging, waiting, self-intoxicating, and aimless wandering. At first glance, this image of homelessness might evoke memories of the *flâneur*, the casual Rambler and “reader” of the cityscape, explored at length first by Baudelaire and later by Benjamin. For Benjamin, the ambulatory gaze of the *flâneur* held an almost transcendental potential, a means of extracting the “eternal” from the “transitory” (Armstrong 2011). And yet we must resist the urge to conflate the poetic meanderings of the *flâneur* through the Parisian boulevards with the image of Lenny marching blistered along the banks of the Thames. Indeed, even if, as Jackson (2015) and Crang (2000) argue, the wanderings of the homeless are not “purposeless” but rather a reflexive “tactic” of the de Certeauian variety, a means of meaningfully navigating the “micro-architectures” of the city, the existential question still looms large: *what keeps these people going?*

Kishik offers an answer to this particular question, suggesting that ‘if he stops, even for a moment, he will have to confront his own nothingness’ (2015:185). The reality, of course, is that even someone with Lenny’s stamina must stop at some point or another. Sooner or later something will grind him to a halt, be it the weight of his rucksack, the blisters along the soles of his feet, or else the hunger in his belly. When he does inevitably stop “nothingness” will be indeed be waiting, transforming him into a “ghost” among the living, thereby forcing him to exist in space that is there above all to be feared, not “read” – the city with its buildings and inhabitants a horizon of indifference and “naked exclusion” (Wacquant 2004). Often the only way the homeless can fight this nothingness is through extended bouts of psychoactive anaesthesia, by implanting their ghostly alterity slap bang in the middle of public space.

Itchy Park

Infinitely more flotsam than flâneur, London’s homeless drift about the city’s public surface, in the process constituting the Other that lurks beneath the noses of the homeful, practically invisible and almost always ignored. They are a radical example of life on the “other side of the tracks,” their repulsive alterity a public challenge to the taken-for-granted conditions that shape “normal” life. By living out in the open – *unconcealed* in Heidegger’s terms - the homeless person makes a mockery of these conditions, turning the reified structures of public space inside-out through the grotesque otherness of their very presence. For fourteen months, my life was spent in these inside-out spaces, drinking, smoking and generally killing time within a small slither of grass and concrete between the adjacent boroughs of Tower Hamlets and the City of London – known locally as *Itchy Park*.

Itchy Park is something of a historical and literary relic, its nickname derived from the long-term presence of homeless sleepers over the last century, and more specifically the lice that afflicted them. Its association with vagrancy and social decay is long standing, despite the ongoing efforts of the local authorities to sanitize the area. It was the setting of Jack London’s (1962[1902]) autobiographically informed masterpiece *The People of the Abyss*, which focused on the hellish realities of London’s urban poor at the turn of

the century. Indeed, the deeper one treads into London's novel, the more his reflections and observations of life in the park appear remarkably sibylline:

'On the benches on either side arrayed a mass of miserable and distorted humanity...It was a welter of rags and filth, of all manner of loathsome skin disease, open sores, bruises, grossness, indecency, leering monstrosities and bestial faces' (1962[1902]:62)

The "bestial" down-and-outers of modern-day *Itchy Park* continue to line the benches, known in local parlance as "addict's corner." Flanked by a number of hostels and day centres, and surrounded by several off-licences selling cheap super-strength booze, the park constitutes a public meeting place for those stuck on London's homeless carousel. It is crucial here to note that homelessness is not reducible simply to rough sleeping, though this is of course one of its inextricable and most "visible" aspects. The reality is that homelessness has a thousand faces, the majority of which are hidden from public view. These hidden homeless exist mostly out of sight, in B&Bs, squats, night shelters, hostels, or else crashing on the floors of friends and family.

Crucially, these sub-categories of homelessness are not mutually exclusive, rather they flow porously into one another, creating situations of chronic upheaval whereby people continuously drift from one sub-sphere into the other; sleeping rough for a while before getting a hostel bed, only for some unforeseen trouble to occur that sees them displaced right back onto the streets. I witnessed this pattern emerge week-in-week out in *Itchy Park*, of people stumbling in and out of rough sleeping as if stuck in the spin cycle of a revolving door. As such, whilst everyone who spent time in the park belonged under the umbrella of homelessness, many could at least return to a hostel bed, even if this position could not be counted on in the long term. The capricious nature of this carousel meant that the *Itchy Park* community remained in a constant state of flux, of people appearing and then disappearing just as quickly. On some days there could be as many as twenty people lined across the benches and on the concrete, on others no more than three or four. Set just off Whitechapel high street and the ever-astir Brick Lane, the area is renowned for its panhandling opportunities, with the park forming the obvious "post-work" hangout, a place where company was sought, drinks taken, drugs bought, and

stories shared. Come nightfall the park and its adjoining streets also became a place for local working girls to meet potential clients, the vast majority of whom were also stuck on their own tragic version of the homeless carousel. Indeed, it is telling that of all the women I encountered during my time in *Itchy Park*, all of them had been involved in sex work at one time or another, a reality that coloured their experience of homelessness in a uniquely gendered way. Demographically speaking however, the majority of *Itchy Park*'s frequent fliers are single men over the age of thirty, British, mostly white and from the lower rungs of the socio-economic ladder, their employment history both highly transient and overwhelmingly blue collar (and deemed by the state to be “intentionally”⁷ homeless).

Despite its fragmentary character, *Itchy Park* retained some ten key stalwarts over the course of my fieldwork, “local faces” whose ongoing presence in the park could be more or less guaranteed, come rain or shine. These individuals formed the backbone of my ethnography, as well as the community's social nucleus. Significantly, the main thing these people had in common was that every single one of them had experienced some kind of tragic relational breakdown. This idea, whereby unique and singular divergent local realities form aspects of wider encompassing assemblages, is captured by Jarrett Zigon's (2015) concept of “the situation.” Put simply, the situation refers to the way that human beings become “caught up” in a set of existential and structural pressures that are at once shared and unique; pressures that condition the possibilities for what we can do whilst simultaneously demarcating what we cannot. Consider these words from Jimmy, a homeless man in his forties who had recently transitioned from rough sleeping into the infamous *Booth House* hostel just over the road from *Itchy Park*:

⁷ As one of the more insidious and perverse sub-classifications of homelessness, the typical target for this label is single men (i.e. the majority of the homeless) who supposedly, could have avoided their predicament. Despite the conditions for rendering a person homeless being invariably complex and oftentimes beyond a person's direct control (loss of employment, relational breakdown etc.) their classification as “intentionally” homeless allows the state a kind of moral wriggle-room that effectively dilutes and delegitimises any subsequent claims for housing and social support – a preemptive strike, so to speak.

'We're all angry about something, everyone here has got a history, got issues. We didn't just wake up one day and decide to be here. And we don't enjoy being in the situation we're in. We just suddenly found ourselves stuck in this existence...but we try our best to help each other, to make a community.'

When Jimmy talks about “making a community” from the ashes of a divergent assemblage of tragic histories, he designates the community as one based on the shared conditions of their situation, of all being trapped in the same existential quagmire. In this sense, the *Itchy Park* community is built on tragedy, an idea that will be explored over the course of this thesis. Significantly though, there is another central pillar propping up this community – *sharing*. Interlaced with the park’s tragic precarity is a “moral economy of sharing,” a web of mutual obligations that sustains communal relations within its boundaries (Bourgois and Schonberg 2009; Wakeman 2016). The material lynchpin holding this web together are drugs and alcohol, insofar as the threat of withdrawal – “clucking” in local parlance – is constitutive of the moral economy of sharing. In this sense, intoxicants can be said to constitute an integral layer in park’s moral and economic fabric, insofar as these addictive pursuits are invariably embedded within wider relational spheres, the key sphere being that of their fellow drug-users and drinkers. It should be noted that these relationships often do not possess the intimacy of what we might more commonly call friendship. As Dave puts it:

'The whole thing is just so transient, you don't really want to give away too much personal information. You never really know who someone is, how long they're gonna be around, if they're trustworthy. It's safer just to keep people at a distance. If there is a community, it's fractured and often very self-serving. It can be very economically driven, in terms of sharing the spoils from begging, or it can be addiction driven, junkies looking after junkies.'

Dave’s analysis encapsulates the fragmentary and unstable quality of the human-human bonds amongst the addicts of *Itchy Park*. For example, even though Max has known some of the park’s protagonists for almost a decade, he views them more as “drug associates” than friends:

‘Just because you get fucked out your head one evening with someone and have a laugh that doesn’t make you best friends. A lot of people around here, they come and go, they’re more like associates, if you know what I mean. Some of us, we do have a real bond, but that comes from time and trust.’

Whilst “real bonds” do exist between the marginalised constituents of *Itchy Park*, the fact is that these mutual sensations of care and trust are built on shared experiences of alienation, drug-bonding, and withdrawal, such that it becomes hard to ever truly disconnect their bond from the reality of their shared conditions as homeless addicts. This is not to deny or trivialise the strength of the bond, rather it is to contextualise its development and perpetuation within a chaotic moral world where the dominant bonds are primarily between drugs and people. Thus when Dave describes this web of obligation in terms of addicts “looking after” other addicts, he is framing the sharing of drugs as a form of care that contains within it a kind of ongoing reciprocity. It is deemed at once unethical and cruel to hang someone out to dry when he or she is clucking, unless one is currently involved in some kind quarrel with that person (perhaps from being hung out to dry previously when the roles were reversed).

I will examine in proper ethnographic depth the ethical, existential and relational complexities of these addictive pursuits over the course of the thesis. Accordingly, it is important to note that the analysis offered throughout these pages owes a significant debt to the work of Philippe Bourgois and Jeffrey Schonberg (2009), whose photoethnography of homeless heroin users in San Francisco has proved seminal within the genre⁸. Indeed, with regards to the anthropological literature on homelessness, drugs and alcohol are predominantly an afterthought – a taken-for-

⁸ The approach taken in their work belongs loosely to what Jackson (2005:xii) calls *existential anthropology*: ‘the endless experimentation in how the given world can be lived *decisively*, on one’s own terms.’ Beyond the anthropological literature, the work that perhaps best captures this spirit is Timothy Donohue’s (1996) *In the Open: Diary of a Homeless Alcoholic*. The book is an autobiographical account of Donohue’s daily struggle with homelessness and alcoholism as he wanders through the United States. Brutal and poetic in equal measure, Donohue’s account of his own existence threads Marxist theories of economy, everyday hunger, and his insatiable thirst for booze into a metaphysical commentary on his own socio-political position, touching with great eloquence themes that will permeate the entirety of the forthcoming chapters.

granted condition of homelessness that warrants plenty of concerned recognition but disproportionately little analysis into whether psychoactive substances might actually be ontologically and existentially constitutive of homelessness itself. *Righteous Dopefiends* represents a major break from this disciplinary reluctance, the authors framing the everyday life of the Edgewater homeless through the notion of “lumpen abuse.”

Through this lens, the seemingly endless carousel of suffering endured by those exiled into homelessness is embedded within a wider set of structural forces (political, cultural, economic) and embodied states of crisis (morbidity, physical suffering, withdrawal). In this sense, the suffering of chronic drug-abusers living under the freeways is approached as a politically conditioned way-of-being that is constituted by a number of abusive relationships occurring all at once, some structural some personal. In this sense, the “lumpen abuse” suffered by the Edgewater homeless is one part of the continuum of violence that sustains and drives everyday existence at America’s margins. In analysing violence as simultaneously intimate and structural, the authors avoid the double-sided trap of reducing violence either to the brute fact of physical force or else plotting its effects in terms of the kind economic overdeterminism favoured by Marxist thinkers. Rather for Bourgois and Schonberg, they are two sides of the same coin.

Within the anthropological conversation on homeless drug addiction, this thesis can perhaps be situated somewhere between Desjarlais’ (1997)⁹ critical phenomenology of homeless being and Bourgois and Schonberg’s critique of the homeless-addicted body as the site of lumpenisation and intimate abuse. In these two cases, as with this project, the body is at once the locus and the instrument of political power. Where this project extends beyond this medial position is in its intention to delve deeper into the existential layers of the addicted body itself, to approach it as a radical and embodied state-of-being that possesses an embedded perspective within an immanent world; a world where the

⁹ Desjarlais’ *Shelter Blues* was something of a watershed moment in the anthropology of homelessness, offering “thick” and extensive ethnography with sophisticated and thought-provoking theoretical analysis to match. Despite being crafted almost two decades ago, his phenomenologically rich ethnography arguably remains one of the best attempts in the field of homeless scholarship to meaningfully connect with the existential conditions of homeless *being*. It represents a radical departure from previous ethnographies that have as their prime focus the empirical strategies of “survival,” in which primacy is given to the practical over the existential, the economic over the emotional, and the praxeological over the ontological.

political and personal tragedies of a life spent at the margins come back not just to haunt the addict, but to possess and transform them as well. This thesis will therefore take the psychoactive substances that are so often etched into the conditions of homeless living to be mutually constitutive not just of the people that use them, but also those who have been lost. In this sense, drugs, human beings and lost Others will be understood as relationally entangled, co-conspirators that constitute one another's boundaries in an often dangerous and invariably exhausting quest for human-human reconnection.

In broader brushstrokes, the aim of this thesis is to make clearer the relationships between the tectonic forces of late-liberal governmentality and the penumbral yet intimate conditions of homeless drug addiction in order to explain why the UK (and London more specifically), one of the most prosperous nation-states in the modern world, has seen its homeless population grow by 26% in the last four years (with London showing a 77% rise in rough sleepers over the same period¹⁰). The task of this project is to paint, with the most vivid colours possible, the everyday realities of drug-addiction on London's streets, to make manifest the lived complexities of urban homelessness without objectifying or essentialising the people involved, and without reifying the structures and forces that put them in this position in the first place. With these intentions now firmly on the table, the following section will briefly lay out why a more intensive ethnographic focus on the addictive pursuits of the homeless is such a pressing and timely endeavour.

Setting the Stakes

For the UK's homeless population, drugs and alcohol are decidedly more than just fun and games. Indeed, drug and alcohol abuse is deemed to be *the* primary driver for homelessness and its escalating mortality rate, accounting for just over a third of all deaths – a statistic that is reflected in the average age of a death for a homeless man, just forty-two years old.¹¹ On the face of it, we seem to be confronted with a population that seems determined to wipe itself out. And yet despite the obviously self-destructive

¹⁰ From: *Housing: Statistical Release. Rough Sleeping Statistics Autumn 2016, England. Department for Communities and Local Government.*

¹¹ Thirty years under that of the general population. See Lancet, 2005.

proclivities displayed by this particular group, the anthropological literature has conspicuously little to say on the matter. Investigating why these risky pursuits are so deeply embedded within the experience homelessness should have, one would have thought, been obvious grist to the anthropological mill. In a perhaps not unsurprising turn, anthropology's reluctance to engage with the nitty-gritty of homeless addiction mirrors its own historical tendency to keep intoxicants somewhat at arm's length, happy enough to explore their symbolic functions as bit-part characters within certain social and cultural arenas (Antze 1987; Bott 1987; Garvey 2005, Gusfield 1987; Holt 2006, Hunt et al. 2009; Joralemon 1984; Kasmir 2005; Mitchell & Armstrong 2005; Papagaroufali 2002; Sherrat et al. 2014) but generally hesitant to explore the ways in which they might actually constitute key conditions for daily existence. Perhaps this historical hesitancy is down to those involved feeling incapable of representing these experiences, or else finding it ethically problematic to do so. In any case, it is telling that when it comes to ethnographically engaging with intoxicants in the homeless context, the anthropological arm seems to grow even longer, content to frame intoxication within ready-made paradigms of "disease"/"mental health" (Drake et al. 1991; Fischer & Breakey 1991; Alverson et al. 2000) or "risk"/"recovery" (Padgett et al. 2008; Susser et al. 1997), thus inadvertently putting more and more distance between itself and the lived realities that constitute addictive pursuits. That these kinds of studies generate an effective "vulnerability profile" is not in doubt. The vulnerability of this approach, so to speak, *is in the profile itself* – in that all we tend to end up with is *an outline* of the condition, viewed from one specific side, a side that looks exhaustively at the consequences of intoxication but has precious little to say on what *it feels like* to be in the midst of a binge. Whether out of ethical trepidation or queer short-sightedness, we as anthropologists seem to have left the task of thinking through addiction's more intimate and complex realities at the artist's door, like a frightened mother who leaves a new-born child at the threshold of a stately manor, convinced that the wealthy inhabitants can give it a life and value where she could not. While Lowry, Bukowski, Fitzgerald, Huxley, Michaux, De Quincey, Wallace, Kennedy, Hamilton and the rest of the intoxicated *literati* wax deeply, torturedly and lyrically on the subject of intoxicated consciousness, anthropologists remain comparatively bound and gagged on the matter,

content to snub the limelight in favour of safer and more reliable exploits, somehow forgetting their role – dare I say their *duty* – to work on the frontline of human existence, no matter what seemingly perverse and (jn)toxic(ated) forms it might take.

Certain scholars, it should be said, have not taken this self-regulated gagging lying down, a select few exploring the ways in which intoxicated consciousness can form the existential scaffolding on which cosmology and the political imagination are built (Furst 1990; Mitchell 2004; Alasuutari 1992; Erofeyev 2002), others suggesting that the pervasive consumption of drugs in our own society is down to the growing disappearance of transcendent initiatory ritual structures, wherein the drug addict longs not so much for the cheap thrill of the high itself, but for the psychic gratification inherent within the “participation mystique” of performing in the dominant metasemiotics of our times: consumerism (Zoja 1989). The point, one that will hopefully grow more complete as the thesis progresses, is that an ethnographic engagement with intoxication need not be subservient to an artistic one. Indeed, ethnography, like art, holds the potential to transfigure the world around us, to rethink the limits of human exclusion and inclusion and make articulate ways of being that might otherwise go unnoticed. It is my hope that the protagonists of this project appear to the reader as animate beings on the page, with their own dense and complex subjectivities, whose actions and choices are simultaneously foreordained and contingent, ensnared in an oppressive and often tragic universe of limited possibilities-of-being that nevertheless remains the only place from which they can carve out alternatives. To fully comprehend the context in which these “alternatives” are embedded – where people live with drugs as much as die from them – we must first come to a basic understanding regarding the tripartite relationship between homelessness, late-modernity, and temporality. The next section will serve as an attempt to reach such an understanding.

Homelessness and the Temporality of Late Liberalism

Consider for a moment the shared etymological origins of “intoxication” and “toxic debt.” Both expressions ultimately stem from the Latin *toxicare*, meaning *to poison*. Understood in this way, both *intoxication* and *toxic debt* represent a precariously balanced system poisoning itself – chemically in the former, economically in the latter. It has been widely agreed that “toxic debt” was both the precondition and the consequence of late-liberal capitalism’s darkest hour, an inextricable component of the 2008 financial crash (Casey 2011; Farlow 2013; Lybeck 2011). The reality, of course, is that the crash did not happen overnight, rather its wheels were set in motion long before the meltdown became so publicly visible; its preconditions interwoven into the ideological fabric of late-liberalism – what Harvey (2007) refers to as its “creative destruction.”

Having already outlined the political and historical forces that have shaped contemporary spaces of homelessness in the UK, I will stop short of needlessly repeating myself, re-emphasising only that organic bodies and financial bodies are prone to inform each other in mysterious, and often tragic ways. Whilst the historical image of ruined stock-brokers throwing themselves out Wall Street windows in the wake of the 1929 crash has been both distorted and sensationalised to almost folkloristic proportions, the responsiveness of suicide to measures of financial austerity has been empirically established in various national contexts (Antonakakis and Collins 2014; Brugha et al. 2011; Ip et al. 2007). Indeed, if the thudding sound of financial collapse really can foreshadow the tragic thud of self-extinction, it seems short-sighted to think that the chemical and the economic are mutually exclusive phenomena. If nothing else, the shared etymological provenance of the two expressions alluded to at the head of this section should serve as a timely reminder to just how pervasive the relationship between the corporeal and the politico-economic can be. Indeed, throughout this thesis I will be consistently trying to tease out the contingent complexities of this relationship, exploring how the intoxicated body, through its alternative temporality, can be read as a (ab)reaction to asphyxiating social norms and politico-moral demands. However, before

I can begin in earnest to probe the homeless-addicted body for its political vein, a few thoughts on the structural character of late-modernity will be necessary.

According to Habermas (1993), the driving force behind the “project of modernity” that began during the Enlightenment was the idea that everyday social life could be “rationally” organised and differentiated into three key domains; objective science, universal morality and law, and autonomous art. This splintering or “decentering” of everyday life brought about by these changing historical conditions saw nature become “desocialized” and the human world “denaturalized” (Flemming 2010:17), endowing the inner world of human subjectivity with a kind of radical autonomy; tearing self and soul from God’s grasp as it were. The result was a secularised “autonomous” self that took the form of a human ideal (Butler 1990; Jung 1998; Rose 1996). As God gave way to the rational mind, the Cartesian dualisms were spawned that still pervade much of contemporary thought,¹² finding ideological refuge in the principles of liberal individualism (de Peuter 1998) – the apex of which emerges in the reflexive self-monitoring of modern consciousness (Abramson & Laviolette 2007; Beck 1992, 2000; Giddens 1990, 1991; Foucault 1990; Lash 1993; Lyng 1990, 2012). Unconvinced by the riddling brushstrokes of the “postmodern” turn, Beck, Giddens and their contemporaries see this reflexive turn as modernity’s “second act” – otherwise known as *late-modernity*. In their eyes, this shift in the ideology of self is an integral driver in the transition between the industrial capitalism of the first act and the risk-laden, “manic” hyper-capitalism of the second (Martin 2000; Uchtielle 1997). The world in this second late-liberal act is one of chronic and decidedly Anthropocene crisis: environmental catastrophe, famine, sociocide, separatism, terrorism and financial breakdown, to name but a few (Vigh 2008).

¹² In the interest of applying a cautionary layer to the argument, it should be noted that whilst Cartesian dualism has undoubtedly played a founding role in a great number of Western intellectual traditions, including anthropology, it is worthwhile noting that Descartes himself, whilst describing separate entities, was in fact looking to establish their unity (Flanagan 1991). Indeed, Lambek (1998) notes that questions of mind-body separation not only predate Descartes, they also arise in a number of non-Western cultural fields.

Reflecting on the deep metaphysical loneliness that these forms of crisis create, Berger et al. (1973) explore the relationship between modernisation and consciousness through the dual prism of bureaucratisation and urbanisation, arguing that these projects in particular have re-calibrated the human experience into something inherently more migratory and dislocated, what the authors call ‘a deepening condition of homelessness’ (*ibid*:32). Under these alienating conditions, the taken-for-grantedness of objective realities start to slip away from us, prompting us to look for footholds in the cavernous recesses of individual subjectivity, whereby ‘the experience of himself¹³ becomes more real to him than his experience of the objective social world’ (*ibid*:74).

On top of this, it is important to note that the emergence of bureaucratic, urban capitalism has not only shaped the organisation of space, but *time* as well. As I will explore in greater depth in the forthcoming chapter, capitalism and time have a very specific relationship, one that gives primacy to the future above all else, a future that is continually furnished – *invested in*, so to speak – through the self-reflexive currency of a reproducible past, that is to say memory. Viewed through a capitalist lens, we all have a “stake” in the project of the future, the potential dividends of which are predicated on the idea that *we all play by the same rules*. The name of this particular game is *Casino Capitalism*, a spectral economic reality that, unlike most ghosts, seeps into the present not through past’s backdoor but through the future’s cracked window, to the extent that the twin-faces of speculation and consumption have become moving spirits unto themselves, manifest in everything from the stock market to the lottery (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000; Strange 1986).

¹³ Significantly, this descent into the inner stream of experience should not be confused with the petty antagonisms of narcissism. Indeed, an important aim of this project is to discredit certain long-standing self-society models held throughout Western history, namely the way that voyages into the flesh of inner space-time have generally been thought of in terms of antisocial isolation, deviancy, selfishness – as illegitimate ways of *being*. To degrade and pathologise journeys into inner life, to confuse transformational experimentation of the internal with run-of-the-mill solipsism is to make a grave mistake, one that arrests our ability to monitor the already questionable health of our own society (Laing 1967; Itten and Roberts 2015).

Indeed, it didn't take long for Durkheim, the grandfather of social science, to recognise that a person's temporal experience was constituted through the prism of society's collective rhythm/"rules". With the kind of functionalism one can expect from any Durkheimian social theory, he reiterated the importance of a concordant temporality as an essential precondition for the maintenance of social order – what he explicitly referred to as “a common time.” In his eyes, a functioning consensus on temporality underwrites the possibility for meaningful and productive social interaction, or what might more fashionably be termed intersubjectivity. Late-liberal capitalism, with its pervasive fetishisation of work (“time is money”) along with the boundaries it postulates between this space and the realm of leisure (holidays, festivals, weekends etc.), would be nigh on impossible to sustain if no-one was able to agree upon some standardised version of what “time” meant.¹⁴ However, even if we take this kind of “cultural unanimity” – as Flaherty (1999:2) calls it – as self-evident under our current socio-historical circumstances, we are still left with some rather glaring unanswered questions.

After all, the standardisation of time into the synchronising structures of clocks and calendars, momentous in its unanimity as it may be, tells us practically nothing about the subjective experience of temporality – what Henri Bergson called *durée* (1991[1911]). As far as Bergson was concerned, the “artificial systems” that measure or “represent” time render it static, in the process obscuring its intrinsic mobility. Time, in his eyes, is perpetual motion, the indivisible flow of which constitutes the self. As Bergson puts it, duration ‘is the form which the succession of our consciousness states assumes when our ego lets itself live’ (1950:100). From this perspective, the flow of time is constitutive of being itself, such that a self – any self – is always a self that *endures*.

In this way, the dissonance between the embodied flow of *durée* and the abstractive devices that “falsify” said flow is bound to create certain idiosyncrasies and

¹⁴ Without the standardisation of time into manageable temporal units trying to work out things like “wages” or “productivity” or “quarterly returns” would cause nothing short of a bureaucratic aneurism.

paradoxes within subjective experiences of time. Indeed, I submit that anyone who plays by society's temporal rules will have experienced situations where time slows to a standstill, where seconds can feel like an eternity, or when years or even decades appear to have slipped by like seconds. Furthermore, these paradoxes can be said to become especially intensive if a person ends up on the wrong side of capitalism's temporal drawbridge. In short, even systems as pervasively "agreed upon" and taken-for-granted as clocks and calendars will not forestall individuals from periodically experiencing often radical disjunctures with the same externalisations that are meant to keep things on an even keel.

In point of fact, Michael Flaherty (1999:3) notes that 'the experience of personal disjuncture is made more visible by viewing it against the backdrop of temporal orthodoxy.' Furthermore, the cohesive and stable social order of Durkheimian thought does not match up to the divergent realities of the world as it truly is. Social reality is a polymorphous composite of diverse and contradictory worlds, what William James (1950) described as "sub-universes." Each of these alternative modes-of-being – as I prefer to call them – possess their own idiosyncratic sense of time, always partially divergent from the dominant temporal regime within which they are invariably embedded. Intoxicants, constituted by their capacity to warp the flow of time (and by extension the flow of self), will therefore be conceptualised as alternative temporal (and ontological) projects unto themselves. As I will demonstrate ethnographically in the chapters that follow, drugs and alcohol have the potential to reveal immense and uncomfortable truths about the alienating conditions of late-liberalism. As such, I will be exploring extreme intoxication as a mode of being-in-the-world that is simultaneously temporal and political, a *being* that actively challenges our in-built assumptions regarding the entanglement between politics, ontology and morality.

First and foremost, approaching the complexities of this challenge requires anthropologists to pay far closer attention to the temporal dynamics of a substance's psychoactive properties, and in particular the ways in which these psycho-temporal

transformations are refracted through the chronopolitical prism of society as it currently stands. I am employing the term “chronopolitical” to describe the relation of time-perspectives to political/ethical decision-making, and in particular how the punctuation of time (by both self and society) remains integral to the distancing and constitution of the Other. Exploring how the radical Otherness of homelessness is temporally constituted will be at the forefront of the next chapter, with analytical focus on the existential realities of extreme boredom.

Chapter Two: Killing Time

Killing Time

This chapter is concerned with the temporality of urban homelessness, with ethnographic focus on the existential contingencies of extreme boredom. For people who suffer homelessness and addiction, deep boredom, I posit, is an existential fact of life that penetrates into the very bones of their being. At first glance, boredom can appear as a kind of catch-all term; a way of describing any experience that is somehow empty or, as Goodstein puts it, “without qualities” (2005). In this sense, it is tempting to approach boredom almost as a kind of transhistorical phenomenon; a state-of-being as old as (human) being itself. Indeed, when Agamben quipped that man ‘is simply an animal that has learned to become bored’ (2004:70), the implication is very much of boredom as a universal condition of humanity. Likewise, Kierkegaard famously attributed an almost mythic quality to boredom, flippantly claiming it to be the “root of all evil.” These ideas raise certain key questions: Is boredom a truly a universal phenomenon across humanity? Does boredom possess a history? What role does boredom play in the rhythm of everyday life?

Whilst these questions have traditionally been taken up primarily by historians, literary theorists and philosophers, they are becoming of increasing interest to anthropology. Sure enough, a brief foray over the literature confirms that boredom is not nearly as transhistorical and “inherent” a human quality as would be easy to assume, instead possessing its own specific history. This history began at some point in the eighteenth century, emerging in the Western world with such mass pervasiveness that Spacks (1995) even goes so far as to describe it as “democratic.”¹⁵ Boredom, in other words, is very much a modern problem (Clare 2012; Musharbash 2007; Pezze and Salzani 2009). Martin Heidegger (1995) made a similar claim, arguing that it is above all else boredom – understood as a kind of ontological mood – that constitutes our attunement to the

¹⁵ Insofar as everyone could take part in it.

world, what he described as the “concealed destination” of modernity. Heidegger describes this kind of ontological boredom as “profound,” in the process drawing a theoretical distinction between boredom as a reaction to some identifiable object/event and *being* bored as deep existential predicament – a “silent fog” that numbs the very fibres of our being into indifference. Informed by Heidegger among others, Svendsen (2005) makes a similar distinction, dividing boredom into two types: “situative” and “existential.”

According to Svendsen, in this latter form both soul and world are disembowelled, in the process causing an aching sense of emptiness that simply cannot be shaken off. Under these conditions, boredom scaffolds reality by dragging the world from its normal context. For Heidegger, this disconnection contains a certain potentiality, namely the possibility of opening up new configurations of meaning and self-insight; of boredom as revelatory of the entirety of our being-in-the-world. This idea echoes the assertion made by Nietzsche, that ‘he who completely entrenches himself against boredom also entrenches himself against himself.’¹⁶ Fundamentally, the idea is that boredom, if examined from a certain angle, can reveal important aspects pertaining to the predicament of human existence. In this sense, boredom as a “mood” does not refer exclusively to a person’s inner psychological state, as though conflatable with emotion, referring instead to a person’s ongoing reflection of how they are, there, *in the moment*. As Throop (2014) argues, moods operate in zones of indeterminacy, constituted by their capacity to at once disclose and encompass a person’s ongoing experience of the world, and in doing so they structure access to different modes-of-being. Tied up in Throop’s analysis is notion that the temporality of human existence and the ongoing negotiation of existential meaning are inextricably entangled.

The indivisible relationship between temporality and being is rarely felt more acutely than in boredom, a state-of-being where time appears to take on seemingly endless, overabundant quality. Evoking the metaphysical anguish experienced by Vladimir and Estragon in Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*, the boredom of homelessness can similarly be

¹⁶ Cited in Svendsen (2005:144).

described as an “awful” place where ‘nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes.’ Despite the definitional ambiguity surrounding the topic, there is a shared consensus that boredom, whatever it may be, invariably endows time with an almost elastic capacity, in which the “lived present” is simultaneously severed from what has already been, and what will be in the future. It is this idea of getting stalled in the present – what I will examine more specifically as “getting stuck” – that I will employ in my discussion of homelessness. Taking the lead from Svendsen and Heidegger, this chapter takes as its primary concern the “existential” over the “situative” form of homeless boredom, the aim being to conduct a rigorous anthropological analysis of not only how boredom has taken hold, and continues to take hold, socially and politically in the age of late-liberal capitalism, but also *the means through which it is transcended*. Following on from the work of Musharbash, I will be treating boredom not as a “universal sentiment,” but as a locally constructed and historically contingent ‘response to rather than a by-product of modernity’ (2007:315).

Ultimately, I will argue that the structural shifts of late-modernity have shunted the urban homeless into deeply precarious social spaces, spaces that João Biehl (2005) might describe as “ex-human.” Unable to produce a market value, the homeless are enclosed between the interstitial brackets of late-liberal politics – described by Povinelli (2011) as the “enforced suspension” of social difference. As part of their tragic abandonment – in which they are rendered “neither something nor nothing” – they are unable to properly shake the bondage of their bracketing, forced instead to continually resist this constriction through the exhausting trials of daily endurance. As the indigestible remainder, and reduced to something resembling Agamben’s (1998) “bare life,” the homeless find themselves caught in a kind of purgatory, locatable neither on one side nor on the other of the temporal organisation of being – found instead in the messy space that lies somewhere just outside of these arrangements. Between the brackets, boredom is the order of the day, and it is served non-stop.

We might here recall Aldous Huxley’s famous assertion that the majority of people lead lives so monotonous and painful that the urge to escape and transcend themselves, even

for a moment, ‘has always been one of the principle appetites of the soul’ (2004:51). The existentially bored homeless know this hunger better than anyone, and it is through their ravenous daily quests for psychoactive transcendence that I will explore the social, political and temporal complexities of boredom in its modern guise. Above all else, adopting this kind of analysis will require a thorough investigation into the ways in which boredom and intoxicated consciousness (explored henceforth as two sides of the same coin) deal with the ongoing dilemma of human temporality, with particular focus on how the homeless conceive and “work” on their (ever-narrowing) futures.

Getting Through the Day

The sky above is ashen and swollen; the air hot and viscid in a way that lets you know rain is just around the corner. It’s mid-afternoon and the benches in *Itchy Park* are starting to fill up. The mood feels mournful in the kind of way that reflects the collective hangover of the group thus formed. The vast majority haven’t been awake for very long, and those that have are already more than a few cans into their breakfast routine. Someone sends a spliff round for good measure. The smell is sweet and acrid at the same time, its milky haze lingering over the benches like a flag at half-mast. Behind their backs the lunchtime traffic snarls its way down Whitechapel High Street, sirens mingling intermittently with impatient engines to create a cacophonous background din. Crossing diagonally through the park are office workers trying to carve out time for a coffee or cigarette. They look stressed, struggling to find enough time. They should inquire over at the benches, if they weren’t so disgusted. Plenty of time over here. Buckets of it. More than we know what to do with.

John – a self-confessed “chronic alcoholic and drug-user” – has spent the last four years sleeping rough, punctuated by occasional periods of hostel living, and barely a day has gone by when he hasn’t spent it on one of these benches, drink in hand, getting through the day, *killing time*. As John and I share a drink, he offers me a cigarette. You can tell straightaway that the tobacco isn’t fresh. ‘*Don’t worry*’, he

tells me, *'it ain't roadside,¹⁷ just old.'* Doing the polite thing, I accept, forced to roll *sans* filter - an *'unnecessary expense.'* As John reminds me that *'it's all the fucking same at the end of the day, just smoke in your lungs,'* I suddenly feel embarrassed for inherently expecting that there would be a filter. I carefully tear off a roach from the rizzla packet, conscious that each tear along the packet's edge represents an explicit cost, that there are *not* plenty more where that came from. I clumsily roll myself a cigarette, knowing all too well that the unfiltered smoke is going to roast my lungs in a way that my privileged body simply isn't used to. I keep my beer close to hand, ready to soothe my throat at the appropriate moments. As I finish rolling, I ask John what's the worst thing he finds about being homeless. His response acutely captures the sense of temporal overabundance intrinsic to the experience of homelessness:

'People think sleeping is the hard part. It isn't. I mean, yea, it's shit finding somewhere to sleep when it's cold and wet; and you don't sleep well, but at least you're occupied. It's the day time, when you need to fill your time, finding stuff to do, that's the hardest part about being homeless. It's not like I want to be doing this all of my life here, in the park. It's just that it's the only thing to do. You just end up so fucking bored the whole time. That's the thing about being homeless, it's just so fucking boring. I ain't got nothing else to do, do I? All I got is drink. What else you gonna do when you're out of work, no money, nothing to your name, no family; you're gonna go to the park and have a fucking drink. It's the only way to get through the day.'

"Getting through the day day" – as John puts it – is an existential cross that all human beings must bear. Quite *how* each person gets through it, and in particular what techniques are employed for the "getting through" is not so universally obvious. Nevertheless, for better or worse, human beings *are* inextricably temporal in their makeup. The point is that time passes through us as much as we pass through

¹⁷ Short for "Roadside Virginia," a play on the ubiquitous *Golden Virginia* tobacco brand, used to describe bits of tobacco that have been extracted from discarded cigarette butts scavenged on the pavement.

it, to the extent that our very subjectivity is inextricably constituted by the filtering of fragmentary experiences into the unifying inner life that we know as consciousness. Whether you see it as boon or burden, the temporal flow of consciousness means that being is not just a state, but a state-in-motion. Viewed through this Bergsonian lens, all being is in fact an incessant flow of *becoming*, thereby ensuring that the ongoing skein of events that constitute human experience are always subject to constant deliberations, reflections, transformations, absorptions, and indeed erosions. There are significant traces of Bergson's ideas in the work of Samuel Beckett, particularly in his preoccupation with the Sisyphean problem of how to represent time – on how 'to eff the ineffable' in Gontarski's terms (2015:7). No wonder then that Beckett referred to time as a 'double-headed monster of damnation and salvation' (1965:11).

This chapter will take Beckett's bipolar monster as its focus, paying special attention to the human capacity for endurance; not (initially at least) in the sense of bearing physical pain, but in the sense of duration as a quality of human existence that is at once elemental and jarring. Whilst satisfactorily "effing" the ineffable flow of time is, as Beckett so often pointed out, always already destined to fail, the need to persevere even in the face of such slim odds remains a fundamental imperative of this project. As Gontarski, one of the leading scholars on Beckett, points out, it is precisely this doomed imperative that sculpts the "impossible figures" that haunt his work. The ethnographic material offered throughout this project is thus driven by a similar doomed impulse. In this sense, this thesis can be read an attempt to provide some kind of partial access into duration, of painting the flow of time in a certain shape, a shape that captures temporality as an ineluctable consequence of being.

We can see this intrinsic sense of lived duration, this deep temporality encapsulated in John's assertion that sleeping rough isn't the worst thing about the homeless experience, that it is *waking*, not sleeping, that takes the biggest existential toll. Sleep "occupies" him by moving time along without him noticing, allowing his consciousness to ignore its own demands while also withdrawing from a world that brutalises and alienates him

(De Warren 2010). “To occupy” is to take up time and space. In capitalist terms, a professional “occupation” is the taking up of time and space as a means of earning a living – *investing in a future through economically “productive” and “legitimate” market activity*. For John, as for all the homeless addicts that graced the park’s benches, an “occupation” of this nature is fundamentally out of the question. In fact, the conspicuous absence of a professional occupation – and by extension any kind of economic present – is invariably a big part of why many people end up homeless in the first place; a situation that drastically shifts the way such people relate to and make sense of the future.

Facing the Future in Late Liberalism

For John, as for many of the urban homeless, intoxicants are something you *do* as much as they are something *you take*. In this particular corner of *Itchy Park*, the pursuit and consumption of intoxicants sets the rhythm of everyday life to the extent that the ensuing psycho-bodily transformations are oftentimes the only means of keeping boredom’s onslaught at bay. Mains et al. (2013) reports something similar in his ethnography of khat¹⁸ consumption amongst the unemployed youth of Ethiopia, noting how tracking down khat and then chewing it with others endowed the day with some kind of meaningful rhythm, in the process taking up time, of which there was plenty of. He suggests that unemployment has created a temporal chasm so vast that it is no longer a transitional space between adolescence and adulthood, but rather an ontological space unto itself; a permanent state-of-being defined above all by inactivity. As with John, the young men in question all attested to enduring extreme boredom, of facing a future without possibility. However, rather than dwelling nihilistically in the present, or else using alcohol as a means of numbing themselves against such anxieties, many of them used khat to forge a desirable temporal narrative in which they were moving toward the future, seeking the psychoactive condition of *mirqana*; a state which moves them beyond the banal realities of the swollen present, allowing them to escape into dreams and hopes for

¹⁸ A green leaf with psychoactive properties when chewed.

the future. Masquelier (2013) analyses the ritualised tea consumption in Niger in a similar vein, exploring how the “fada” group helps to forge meaningful temporalities in the face of socio-political stagnation, in the process modifying their relation to an uncertain and stalled future. In both these cases, inactivity is not an inevitable guarantor of the kind of “trouble” that Jervis et al. (2003) found in their ethnopsychological study of the experience of boredom on a Native American Reservation, their focus being the ways that the legacy of postcolonialism has warped their perception of time and self.¹⁹ Trouble or no trouble, what all these divergent ethnographic examples *do* have in common is that all the people described have a warped and problematic relationship with the future, underwritten by a daily existential imperative to *kill* time rather than spend it.

Despite facing different social, political and material pressures, the homeless addicts of *Itchy Park* have a similarly “knotted” relationship to the future. Take Max for example, one of my key informants. Max grew up just a stone’s throw from the park itself. His parents arrived in London as part of the large-scale Bangladeshi migration that occurred in the 1970s, setting themselves up in *Tower Hamlets*.²⁰ In his youth Max had ambitions to become a hip-hop artist, going so far as to produce a demo in his late teens that attracted interest from a record label. Max claims that the deal fell through when they realised he was a Muslim. I learn about this part Max’s life history when he decides to take me on an impromptu walking tour of *Brick Lane*, pointing out places of local interest; where he picks up his prescriptions, where he scores, good begging spots, or else directing my attention to significant pieces of graffiti and local artwork. As we walk and chat, Max swigging intermittently from a can of super-strength cider, he tells me about his ambivalent relationship with Islam, in particular how his opiate addiction and ongoing alcoholism have put a seemingly irreconcilable strain on his already fragile religious convictions. He confides in me that the idea of belief is still meaningful and potentially important, but in the wake of all that has gone wrong in his life he seriously struggles to get even that far:

¹⁹ See also Wexler’s (2009) study on the pervasive sense of anomie amongst the Inupiat of Alaska, made manifest in disproportionate levels of “no future” suicide.

²⁰ For a more detailed look at these migration patterns see Adams (1987) and Gardner (2009).

'I want to believe. I mean, sure, there has to be something, right? Or else what is there? Maybe I'll get back there in the end, who knows. Just with everything that's happened in my life...I lost hope.'

Max's wavering faith and loss of hope is intrinsically related to the breakdown of his family relations, in particular those between himself and his parents. Max begun self harming and using drugs in his late teens, choices he describes as a response to sexual abuse he suffered from a close family member throughout his adolescence, a secret that he has continued to keep from his parents. As he puts it:

'No-one ever noticed the abuse when it was going on. So I started to substitute that pain by self-harming, by cutting myself. After a while the physical pain wasn't enough, so I started building a cocoon around myself with drugs and alcohol. You know, to keep it all out. The thing about emotional pain is that it becomes so much that you never know what you're capable of. When you cut yourself you exchange the emotional pain for physical pain, it becomes something you can handle, something you can control. It's just the cut, the blood.'

Quick to dispel the common stereotype that his self-harm was some kind of "attention seeking," Max emphasised to me that he had *'never done it for attention, that's why all my cutting is on my upper legs, on the inner thighs, out of sight. It's not for anyone else to see. It's for my sense of control.'* In the end, Max was arrested and charged with conspiracy to supply heroin and sentenced to five years in prison, a charge that his parents were unable to forgive him for, disowning him and in the process excommunicating him from the family home. On the day of our walk Max stresses to me that selling the heroin was never a case of profiteering, but rather a case of "feeding" his habit, of keeping himself wrapped in the protective cocoon that guarded him from the traumatic ghosts of his past.

On top of all this tragedy, Max was also the victim of an unusual bureaucratic mishap that never saw him officially registered as a British citizen. Despite being born and raised in London, Max effectively became classified as an illegal alien, making him ineligible for parole over the course of his sentence – regardless of his behaviour. With “criminal” added to his growing list of identifiable pathologies (namely junkie and illegal alien) and his Muslim family unable to accept the lived complexities of his drug addiction, Max fell into homelessness on leaving prison.

For a single man deemed by the state to be “intentionally homeless,” securing any form of housing with a criminal conviction, let alone a drug-related conviction, is notoriously so difficult as to be practically impossible. Without housing, and with his citizenship status as it currently stands, the possibility of acquiring any kind of gainful employment is next to nothing. In a very real sense, Max represents the kind of overdetermined and “lost” subjects that constitute the modern “economy of abandonment” (Povinelli 2011). One is reminded of Deleuze’s (1992:6) assertion that ‘a man is no longer a man confined but a man in debt.’ In being refused parole, Max has paid his “debt” to society at least two times over, and still the bailiffs continue to hunt him down. Trapped in a kind of socio-political and material purgatory, it is not an exaggeration to suggest that Max feels this never ending debt in the bones of his existence. In a perverse sense, the homeless, through their lumpenisation, can be understood as the essential keystones for the entire system of (non)serviceable debt (Bourgois and Schonberg 2009). They are the ultimate losers, flushed into the gutter as “unworkable bodies.” In the shit-fight at the bottom, they lost out, their subjugation effectively propping up the hegemonic structures above them. In a perverse sense, the norms of modern society are dependent on those who don’t meet them, bringing them into the social fold specifically through their rejection (Agamben 1998; Butler 1993).

Sexually abused as a child by someone who was meant to care for him only to be punitively sanctioned and pathologised by society in the aftermath for his means of coping, and subsequently estranged and ostracised from the intimate sphere of the

family, Max's present is constituted by an ongoing breakdown of his most intimate relational connections, transforming his future into what he perceives as a barren wasteland. Three years after his release, Max is still fighting his status:

'I want to work but it's illegal for me to be employed. I can't claim housing benefit because of my status. I can't do or be anything. How do they expect me to live? I've been stuck in this limbo for so long now, it just feels normal. I ain't got no future.'

Forced to wear the twin stigma of criminal-addict on his sleeve, Max cannot even secure a roof over his head, let alone an economically productive "occupation." Consequently, Max, like everyone else in *Itchy Park*, has effectively slipped through the market's net and into its late-liberal underbelly, into moral economies of being and employment that are above all *ungainful*. Through Max's precarious situation we see the danger of the future drifting further and further away from the present, articulated as a kind of arriving that never arrives. In this sense, Max is as haunted by his lost future as he is by his tragic past.

Furthermore, in being defined as "chronic" drug addict, Max, Like John, is forced to confront a kind of double-diagnosis, one that marks his disease as having a specific temporality in and of itself, namely one of "endlessness." The biomedical model of addiction-as-disease – chronic, prone to relapse, predetermined by genetics and neurobiology, and beyond the remit of the will – reflects wider advances in medicine, in which silver-bullet solutions are sought for chronic human conditions (Bourgois & Schonberg 2010; Brandt 1987; Rhodes 1990; Taussig 1980) despite the growing body of evidence that frames addiction as a social-structural problem of late-liberalism (Bourgois & Schonberg 2010; Orr 2006; Peele 1998; Zoja 1989). For the drug addict, relapse ("to slip again") is more a promise than it is a threat – one loaded with moral baggage. It denotes a kind of predictable failure that borders on a type of eternal return; like a bad check that just won't stop bouncing back (Garcia 2010).

In this sense, the “chronicity” of addiction is effectively a state-of-being unto itself, at once continual and endless, whilst at the same time future-governed by the inbuilt destiny of “inevitable” relapse. Indeed, a number of scholars have noted that the chronically ill are often forced to exist on shaky ontological ground, forcing the patient into ever deepening spirals of existential crisis, of never-ending uncertainty (Biehl 2007; Kleinman 1989; Jackson 2005). Interestingly, the homeless addicts of *Itchy Park* both affirmed and contradicted this idea. On the one hand, their life was experienced as an ongoing breakdown, a life in perpetual collapse. In this sense, their status as people and citizens was anything but certain. On the other, the deep boredom of the everyday instilled within them a peculiar sense of fixity, of “stuckness.” In this sense, if there was one thing they *could be certain of* day-in-day-out, it was that boredom was always just around the corner, if not already there. They felt as if the tragic conditions of their life were without end, that their very being was constituted by this continuous state of misery.

Simultaneously medicalised and criminalised, Max has found himself trapped inside a rather perverse paradox wherein his ongoing addiction, which is medically anticipated due to the chronicity of the condition, is simultaneously rendered as a criminal choice in the eyes of the law. This process is an increasingly powerful instrument in the carceral politics of late-liberal governance (Garcia 2010; Laing 1967; Wacquant 2009), in which previously reified boundaries between the remedial imperatives of medicine and social care and the state’s authority to intervene in the name of protecting its citizenry from criminal behaviour appear to have collapsed in on themselves, rendering any remaining differentiation ultimately superficial. Caught in the medical-juridical flows of this “intradiscursive conflict” (Foucault 1980), and effectively foreclosed from the capitalist project, Max’s future has been reduced to abject nothingness.

In acknowledging the disintegration of his future in the face of crippling socio-political alienation, Max shows himself to be acutely aware of capitalism’s temporal regime, specifically that it requires not only an open and investable future, but one

that is, in Poveinelli's (2011:27) words, both "immediate" and "already present." This "immediate futurity" that sustains the chronopolitical machinery of late-liberal capitalism is constituted by what Thompson (1967) calls a particular regime of "time-discipline." For the time-disciplined, time is a currency – something that can be saved, expended, or wasted. In this context, there is no such things as "nothing to do" (such ideas are themselves effectively a *waste of time*). Indeed, Foucault said as much when he spoke of how disciplinary power has come to possess its own temporality, of how '[It creates] a new technique for taking charge of the time of individual existences; for regulating the relations of time, bodies and forces; for assuring an accumulation of duration; and for turning to ever-increased profit or use the movement of passing time' (1979:157). In other words, whether one "profits" or not from experience is contingent upon the ongoing accumulation of "lived" time in the service of a "progressively forming" future. The disciplinary power of "linear" time, then, is very much a question of eggs and nests, such that its articulation is geared towards the "hatching" of a specific type of late-liberal individual.

Thus when Max says he '*ain't got no future*,' he is speaking directly to the foreclosing of a capitalist *version* of the future, one that is expected to be continuously conditioned by the prevalent market logic of employment and productivity, viz. *occupation*. Recognising himself as "unemployable" and "stuck in limbo," Max is the embodiment of the market's human saturation point, keenly aware of his place in the overflowing riptide of human ruin, one hopeless soul amongst a surplus of lumpen²¹ bodies that simply cannot take part in the market's flows. Martin Frederiksen (2013) uncovers a similar situation amongst the disaffected youth of post-soviet Georgia, describing the future as an affective presence that moves into the present through a kind of haunting. For the forgotten young men of Batumi, the future could be at once over-multiple and despairingly empty, the result being a kind of temporal ambiguity that often left daily life

²¹ It should be noted that, like Bourgois and Schonberg (2011), I am not using the term "lumpen" in the strictly Marxian sense of the word, i.e. those people structurally positioned just below the wage worker, propping up the system through irregular employment. Rather I use the term to evoke the way in which these people have "fallen" outside the temporal and economic ontology of capitalism

severely drained of meaning. Consequently, many men spent their days in constant search of existential relief from oppressive shadow of the future, most commonly through drinking or drugs. Like Max, the Batumi youth felt as though they had been forcefully crammed into life's waiting room, a place defined above all by its "stuckness."

The point is that Max's alienation is as much temporal as it is economic. Recall that Max, John, and every other homeless addict in *Itchy Park* are (most of the time) *waking up alive* each morning. Waking up to each day with no "legitimate" occupation, and thus devoid of any remotely tillable future, the homeless are effectively divorced from the synchronising time-orientations that underwrite the dominant chronopolitical regime. Excommunicated to the peripheries of the economic-temporal model that they were birthed into, their pockets emptied and their possibilities-for-being foreclosed, social life becomes reduced to a physical and psychic struggle to sustain meaningful existence. This simultaneous link between biomedical determinism, addiction, and criminality evokes Agamben's (1998) notion of the biopolitical; an inter-connection that will be explored in greater depth in chapter five. For now, we can begin by imagining Max's exhaustion and marginality as a vista into the politicisation of the body intimated in Agamben's analysis of the modernity. Ultimately, an addict does not do drugs in a social or political vacuum. With the body now the primary target of political power, the addict is simultaneously at the mercy of legal intervention, medical coercion, psychiatric labelling, and moral disapproval – the combined forces of which form the "structures of exception" that make up his concept of *bare life*. As this thesis progresses, this concept of biopower will eventually be woven into a theory of abjection that situates the bodily techniques of addiction within wider spheres of ethical and political exigency.

Whilst Max's situation is unquestionably unique and specific to his own personal life trajectory, the disparate elements that constitute the conditions of his homelessness – relational trauma/breakdown, familial rejection, incarceration, judicial

disenfranchisement, politico-economic alienation, biomedical pathologisation – read like an architectural blueprint for almost any homeless person who finds themselves embedded in heavy-ended addictive pursuits. For the homeless, life often feels like a constant process of *breaking* down. Consider these words from Jimmy, a fifty-year-old man from a travelling community who was made homeless after his wife disowned him when she found out he was recreationally using drugs behind her back:

‘Everything in my life is just falling apart at the moment. I can’t catch a break, like the rug is being taken out from under me. The longer I go without contact [with his family], the harder it is to make it back. I just feel like my life is slipping through my fingers.’

Notice the usage of the present participle: *falling*, *slipping*. It is commonplace to describe the homeless as those who have *fallen* through society’s cracks. This expression is misleading in the sense that it takes as axiomatic that the worst is somehow over; in saying that they *have* fallen through, that the experience of dislocation is to suggest, to some extent, that the experience is *already in the past*. Locking someone’s predicament in the past tense often has the effect of creating a moral distance that can seriously dilute the empathic potential of a person’s reaction to another’s misfortune: “*What’s done is done*”, “*it’s in the past now*”, “*it’s history now*”, “*they’ve made their choices*.” Using the past tense in this manner is part of a wider repertoire of objectification and marginalisation that ultimately serves to neglect the realities of the homeless condition as it unfolds sequentially in the present. Jimmy’s use of the present participle, the *-ing*, reminds us that the lived feeling of breakdown is continuous, exponential, and perceptibly unending. It also reminds us that time does not stop for them, that each recurring day has to be faced and occupied in some way, shape or form. One way or another, the homeless end up as castaways on the shores of a future-fixated temporal regime, dislocated from a way-of-being that for most of their lives seemed like a tacit and taken-for-granted aspect of their social and existential scaffolding. The potential trauma of this politico-temporal dislocation, where one is stripped of one’s future and given a front-row seat to the spectacle of its own violent disintegration, to palpably feel it *slipping through one’s own fingers*, should not be underestimated.

Indeed, the lives of homeless addicts, endured on the abject peripheral of legal and state institutions, invariably involve the development of radically dissociated subjectivities; their private tragedies turned into a public pageantry that is at once socially deplorable and politically invisible. Under these conditions, I intend to show that there is no such thing as a clear and continuous link between past, present and future. Instead these tenses bleed and collapse into one another, creating fragmented and partial temporal frames that are continuously cannibalising one another.

Getting Stuck

Displaced onto the outskirts of public life, with the prospect of legitimate employment and a securable future nothing more than a pipe-dream, the homeless of *Itchy Park* have grown so immeasurably bored that each day their very *being* threatens to swallow them whole. Bracketed by the dominant temporal order, with “normative” time’s river flowing past them rather than through them, the homeless find themselves stuck in a situation where ways of being-in-the-world no longer match up with the values of the world at large, a tension that gives birth to what Musharbash, in her ethnography of an aboriginal settlement, describes as “meaningless fits” (2007, 315). Boredom, she writes, emerges from this dissonance between values and circumstances. Inspired by the work of Edmund Leach (1968), she claims that boredom at Yuendumu is constituted above all by a lack of meaning, borne of an oppressive present that lacks the novel events required to produce meaningful intervals in social life.

Like the bored aboriginals, the homeless addicts of *Itchy Park* also experience time’s river as a stagnant and limitless repetition of the same. ‘*Same shit different day*’ is a cultural idiom to this effect, a statement of existential fact shared across the benches, and one that Larry, another of the park’s tragic stalwarts, is particularly fond of uttering. Larry has been dossing around East London for almost twenty years. Originally from Glasgow, he came to London in search of greener economic pastures, his late teenage years in Scotland a blur of recreational drugs and youthful apathy. Larry describes his

first few years in London as a kind of hand-to-mouth experience, picking up labouring work where possible, though increasingly drawn to the drug-trade as a means of daily subsistence. Larry's nickname in the park is "The Doctor," a moniker based on his propensity for always having clean needles to spare, as well as reputation for bringing people back from the brink of overdose by using adrenaline shots. Larry admits that in these early days, his position as a dealer *'kept his habit at a ridiculously high level.'* Eventually Larry's precarious way of life caught up with him, coming to a head during an altercation with another heroin user who accused him of being a police "snitch." In the ensuing fracas, Larry's accuser came off significantly worse, his injuries serious enough for the authorities to get involved, the end result being an extended prison sentence for his role in the assault, compounded by the discovery of class A drugs at his then place of residence.

Like Max, Larry fell into homelessness leaving prison, a common problem that affects a high proportion of ex-offenders, the causes of which are complex and multi-layered, though can be partially explained by lack of advice during prison itself, the lack of appropriate accommodation, lack of income and savings, poor job prospects, the stigma of incarceration, and the absence of stable relationships on the outside (Clancy et al. 2006; Lewis et al. 2003a; Maguire and Nolan 2007). As Larry himself puts it:

'You get out of prison, it's just you and twenty other junkies waiting to be kicked out onto the streets. You've got forty-six quid in your pocket, or whatever it is they give you when you leave, and you can't get money from signing on for six weeks, is that gonna last you? Fuck off it is. You've got nowhere to go, so you get together and score some drugs to sell. You end up drifting between other people's houses and the streets. Nowhere to go and nothing to do but stick gear up your veins and try and block it all out.'

Larry's testimony reveals how prison can possess its own kind of social afterlife, one that is folded into the cyclical architecture of homelessness. Trapped in the "drug-life" ever since arriving in London, Larry knows this negative cycle as well as anyone, his

latest ride on the carceral tilt-a-whirl forming part of his most recent compound crisis, in which a pending court-case for drug-possession coincided with the death of both his parents:

'I lost both parents when I was on remand. Had to attend their funerals in shackles. I was found not guilty a week after my father's death. I should have been able to bury my parents. I'm an atheist, my parents were my Gods. My mother gave me life. She was my God.'

I ask Larry whether he felt like he was able to properly grieve under such conditions: *'I wish I could grieve properly. Instead I just sit here and drink, shoot up. Sometimes I wish I could just scream. I go to sleep hoping I don't wake up. I'm fed up. Sick of it.'* The sudden death of both his parents in conjunction with his incarceration marked the collapse of his social universe. On one of the rare occasions that Larry's skin makes an appearance from behind his shell-suit's nylon curtain, he shows me the condition of his left calf. The sight is of a muscle in the midst of cannibalising itself. Whole craters of flesh collapsed in on themselves, injection sites as shark-bites of organic decay, a body at war with itself.²² Tony, who has known Larry for over a decade, tells me in no uncertain terms that *'he's gonna kill himself. He'll die with a needle sticking out of him. He plays roulette every time he shoots up.'* Tony knows what he's talking about, a career addict, and one of Larry's longest standing partners-in-crime, so to speak.

Despite Tony's warnings, Larry shows no signs of mollifying his behaviour, not because he is in denial about Tony's morbid premonitions, but because such warnings do not represent any kind of novel or unforeseen truth. As Larry himself puts it: *'I'm a dead man walking...drugs aren't life, they're death.'* As we sit and work through our respective drinks, Larry continually returns to the subject of his parents, and in particular to his aching regret that he was unable to bury them *'in a proper way.'* He identifies that moment as the catalyst for the situation he finds himself ensnared in at

²² As Bourgois and Schonberg have noted, 'abscesses are a lumpen medical condition par excellence. They are experienced almost exclusively by street-based addicts, and they are self-inflicted' (2009:102).

present, of a Beckettian daily existence where ‘*nothing changes. Everything stays the same. You just get stuck, it’s fucking hard to get out of. Impossible maybe, for me anyway.*’ With his leg turning into an almost vestigial appendage, not to mention his criminal record and ongoing chemical proclivities, any kind of legitimate “occupation” is out of the question. Like Max, Larry understands this situation for what it is, that he is “stuck” in an abysmal vacuum created by the realities of his own ongoing social abandonment, a dead man stuck on the hard shoulder of the living, stuck in a world where there is precious little to do other than court anaesthesia, where nothing changes with an asphyxiating predictability: *same shit different day*. Each day Larry the dead man continues to wake up alive, and each morning the nothingness of the upcoming day swarms over and through him with the timelessness of a motor idling, like a flywheel spinning but not engaging the drive-shaft, failing to activate the all-important differential that translates the activity of living into meaningful movement. All of *Itchy Park’s* homeless are, to some extent or another, bound up in this process of *getting stuck*.

This vignette reveals that boredom – what Larry configures as “stuckness” – is not in a person’s head, as it were. Rather than buying into the Cartesian assumption that boredom represents but one subjective state of mind among many, I have taken boredom to be a prime existential condition of homeless-addicted being; within the local parameters of *Itchy Park* at least. Drawing on Heidegger’s (1995) notion of profound boredom, Larry and Max’s stuckness should not be understood as a mood or emotion that is somehow subordinate to the mechanics of cognition, but rather as prime component of the existential scaffolding of Dasein (being-in-the-world) – what he calls “disposedness” (*Befindlichkeit*). Our disposedness is intrinsically related to the contingency of our place in the world, how disposed and attuned we are to the situation in which we find ourselves always already embedded. The notion of disposedness means that we intrinsically possess basic emotive attachments to the world as it unfolds, attachments that cannot be severed, for they are constitutive of Dasein itself. These are not experiences that occur at the sunken and opaque level of the spirit or soul, but rather they are part of an ongoing and embodied reflection of how we are, there, *in the*

moment. Moods then (understood here in terms of existential attunement), are not categorisable as either subjective or objective, rather they are the embodiment of continuous moment of inbetweenness – that is to say that we constantly find ourselves in specific situations that contingently determine the very possibilities for living. Borrowing the language of Jason Throop (2014), moods are responsive to how we “come along” in the world.

Crucially though, for the homeless person tragically ensnared in the bear-trap of existential boredom, the “coming-along” that conditions their “disposedness” can be viewed as somewhat kinked, sparking a narrowing of possibilities to the extent that what may once have felt like embedded continuity is now experienced as discontinuity or blockage, a “stuckness,” in Larry’s terms. Indeed, if we are prepared to entertain the Heideggerian position that a person’s ontological attunement, that is to say their situated “being,” is always already coetaneous with the world as it unfolds, we can understand how the abject “nothingness” of Larry’s everyday puts a knot in the flow of existence, forcing him to live within the knot, so to speak. Worth noting is that this predicament is not an intrapsychic one, rather it denotes the way in which Dasein senses itself within the assembled complexity of particular situation; an understanding of self, surrounding and time that is fundamentally implicit. So, if we take “disposedness” as something implicit, world-relating and thus ultimately “non-cognitive,” we can perhaps approach the boredom experienced in *Itchy Park* as something that stalls a person’s temporal and ontological motor. Boredom can therefore be said to pose a radical threat to the possibility of being, creating an ever-narrowing future in which certain options for living no longer exist. In this sense, the relational tragedy and temporal precarity that constitute existential boredom as an embodied mood can be said to have pervaded, suffused and coloured the very conditions of their reality, in the process creating affective intensities that shape the contours of their everyday experience.

Under these conditions, the (narcotic) transcendental can thus be conceptualised as a kind of jump lead, as a means of untying the knot in which they are forced to exist. Ultimately, I am proposing that drugs are often the primary tool through which the

homeless attempt to loosen this existential entanglement. In this way, existential boredom and narcotic transcendence will be re-articulated as two sides of the same coin, as the point in which the ontology of human social existence (governed by temporality and care for others) meets ontology in the sense of other worlds/bodily states and planes of reality. Having utilised Heidegger's concept of *Befindlichkeit* to call attention to the intrinsic relationship between boredom and drugs on London's streets, I must now return the narrative to *Itchy Park* as a means of ethnographically enriching this idea of "nothingness," of teasing out the complex ways in which the temporality of boredom works to fan the flames of socio-political abjection, to explore in greater depth what it is like to live within the knot.

Doing Nothing, Being Nothing

In his revealing cross-cultural study of psychiatric hospitals in Romania and America, Jack Friedman (2012) explores the ways in which studying the experience of inactivity can provide a distinct methodological challenge to the project of ethnography. Whilst acknowledging the myriad ways that the anthropological lens has enabled us to go beyond the experience of inactivity itself, in the process opening up the various social, political and existential forms that emerge from this particular condition, Friedman is simultaneously wary of the hermeneutic impulse hardwired into anthropology's mainframe. He claims that the anthropological imperative to tease deeper meaning and connection from the puzzle of human experience makes it tricky to take, at face-value, situations where people claim to be "doing nothing" – particularly when, at the surface level, this may well appear to be the case. As he puts it: 'this is the great challenge, for, to write an ethnography of inactivity is, in the end, both the challenge of writing of the experience of nothing while, simultaneously, being an exercise in challenging the nature of ethnography itself' (2012:8). The nature of my fieldwork ensured that this was a challenge I had no choice but to accept. Accordingly, in bid to at least partially surmount Friedman's challenge, I will now offer some thoughts on the difference between nothing and vacuity, the aim being to ethnographically illuminate the ways in

which people endure “nothingness,” with particular focus on how these endurance trials relate to the (narcotic) transcendental jump lead mentioned just above.

The thing about getting wasted on park benches is that it *takes time*. On waking, the first few hours in the park are a solemn, funereal affair. There are few exchanges between the park’s protagonists, many of whom say nothing at all. Often the most prominent sounds are fingertips rustling through tobacco pouches, or the jangling of loose change in calloused palms as people work through how much bang they can expect from their buck. At the beginning of the day, many of the bodies are folded over themselves like rows of deflated queries. With the day set upon them, heads are often found in hands, the cold and interrupted nature of the last night’s sleeping arrangements producing a collective lethargy that stains the space with a sensation of piercing insomnia. Above all there is quiet, punctuated mainly by weary exhalations of breath, as it dawns on park’s residents that they have to go through it all again, just like the day before, and the day before that. By the time dusk arrives many of them will be dancing, hugging and fighting. For now, each body remains anchored in the jarring compost of its own solitude. This is the precisely challenge laid down by Friedman: how do you provide descriptive thickness to situations where, overtly at least, nothing seems to be happening?

On this particular day, one of the staff from the new pizza restaurant across the road walks through the park, looking to give free samples out to passers-by. He walks right past our group, offering not so much as a glance in our direction. As Larry remarks right after, *‘he walked right past us like we were a bunch of fucking lepers.’* Max mumbles something under his breath, I make out the words *‘invisible’* and *‘untouchable.’* Later I ask Max to elaborate on what I overheard:

‘These people man, they think there’s something wrong with us. Like we’re dangerous, or diseased. They just look right through us, like we don’t even exist, just because we got a drink in our hands. Like we’re nobody. People look at us and think we’re the plague, makes us feel like shit. All it takes is for someone to just say hello. It’s part of

being human. You're the first person in time to actually approach us and have a conversation. Do you understand how nice that feels for someone to actually stop and talk to us? We ain't bad people man, we're just doing it differently. We're the undesirables, we know that.'

Walking past a bunch of homeless people, huddled together on benches, beer in one hand, head in the other, it is easy to say that nothing is happening. In such situations, it is so much easier to look through the space than directly at it. Furthermore, if your worldview happens to be shaped by the capitalist ethos of synchronicity and productivity, happening upon this inert gathering of down-and-outers, it seems self-evident to suggest that no-one is “doing” anything. From this perspective, if you “do” nothing, *you are nothing*. However, as Max and Larry demonstrate, they are very much aware of their marking as an undesirable Other. They are acutely aware of the conditions of their own invisibility, perceiving themselves as transparent ghosts, or else “untouchable” lepers. They understand themselves as under a very specific gaze, the gaze of exile, of abandonment. Rather than engaging with the alterity of homeless existence – “having a conversation” – and thus giving themselves a possibility to connect with the divergent forms of *being* that urban living demands, *these homeful people* sure up their own boundaries by averting their eyes, or else *looking right through them*, as if they were not even there in the first place.

Indeed, the longer I spent hanging out on the benches, the more obvious it became that each person was acutely aware of this disgusted gaze, of their own repulsive alterity. Even when they were bent-double under the pressure of their own solitude, each and every one went through moments of acute self-awareness that was marked by a highly amplified sensitivity to self and surroundings. The more one zooms in on intervals of “empty” time, the less empty they seem to be. Indeed, when examined through the right kind of lens, they turn out to be rather swollen – not of deducible complex events or exertions in an objective sense, but of emotions, thoughts, fantasies, illusions – what Goffman (1961) would describe as “engrossment.” So when a routine passer-by tells herself that these people are “doing” nothing, she is conceptualising the “nothing” as an

absence, a vacuum, empty. She forgets that nothing is an ongoing experience, an integral component of the break(ing)down of “normal life” that was analysed in the previous section. Julie, a woman in her late-fifties, has been homeless on-and-off for over thirty years, during which time she has intermittently kept a diary. Julie very kindly permitted me to read some of her entries, and transcribe parts that I felt might be analytically pertinent:

I have never been so lonely. I've been trying to figure out how my life has gotten this bad. I have thought I should end my life. The biggest mistake of my life was not going to Denver with Jamie; but I got cold feet. I have been trying to figure out how my life got so bad. I looked out from my bench this morning and just thought what's the point of all this. It felt like nothing.

The more time I spent with Julie, the more it became apparent that Jamie wasn't “real” in the biological sense of things. Indeed, whilst at first Julie made only passing references to her mystery partner, as we began to spend more time together, the more elaborate, convoluted and downright contradictory the stories became. Ultimately the more attuned I became to the divergent flow of these “street stories,” the more I came to see them as a window into the reality from which the homeless had been frozen out from and their ongoing attempts to either re-enter or circumnavigate it. In a sense, these performative fragments of truth made concrete the social rejection that had since been embodied in the viscera of their everyday experience. Moreover, for the homeless themselves, these narratives were spaces in which the “nothingness” of their daily lives was rethought and re-evaluated.

Significantly, the “nothingness” of Julie's existence is brought about not by the claustrophobic inertia of the three-by-three cell as in solitary confinement, but rather the sheer vast facelessness of the cityscape. Julie's words are a reminder that “nothing” is something that a person gets stuck in, something that *happens* to that person, day in, day out. Nothingness is *not* synonymous with vacuity. The person may feel “empty” (that is to say isolated, fragile, alone) but that does not mean that they do not feel in their bones

the unravelling of the day, even if this unfolding does not take the form of manifest, external stimuli. Rather, that which is so readily misjudged as time devoid of overt complexity or intricate praxis is in fact loaded with cognitive transfigurations and the affective syntax of existential boredom on the part of those who are privately, actively, and self-reflexively engrossed by their immediate circumstances, irrespective of the surface appearance of uneventfulness.

The intention of these ethnographic examples is to flush out the particular connection between boredom and the experience of time. As John expressed to me one morning, *'these days just seem to go on forever, like they're never going to end.'* This sense of time lengthening, what in more technical terms can be described as "protracted duration," is a common feature of homeless temporality, one that all my informants attested to at one point or another. The relentless monotony of the everyday holds a particular kind of tedium for the homeless individual. As I have already shown, the "dragging on" of the day inflicts a special kind of violence on a homeless person's existential foundations. As such, it demands a special kind of violence in return, the *killing of time*. As Tony puts it: *'that's the thing, you've got to find a way to kill the time somehow, otherwise it'll just fuckin' eat you up.'* Building on Tony's gastric metaphor, we can perhaps conceptualise the temporality of homelessness as an existence that must be endured inside the jaws of a great beast that is determined to devour it. For the protagonists of *Itchy Park*, their endurance of existential boredom really does give them what Joseph Brodsky (1997) would call a "full look at the worst" – insofar as their sense of self and world becomes swallowed up by the tar pit of 'pure, undiluted time in all its repetitive, redundant monotonous splendour' (*ibid*:109). As part of his reflections on boredom, Brodsky suggests that one should "let boredom squeeze you," the idea being that 'the sooner you hit bottom, the faster you surface' (*ibid*). Heidegger sings a similar tune, arguing that the experience of *Hingehaltenheit* (one of boredom's key "structural moments") – translated literally as being-held-out-into-the-nothing – sparks a moment of profound reflective distance in which Dasein becomes entranced by this "pure" time; a distance through which the possibilities-of-being that sustain Dasein in its authenticity are suddenly made manifest, whilst also remaining just out of reach. Paradoxically then,

it is through this very entrancement that Dasein can make sense of its potentiality-for-being. For Heidegger and Brodsky, boredom is the means through which Dasein achieves “self-disclosure” and learns to speak the language of time. In other words, the means by which human beings navigate the realities of their existential situation become pronounced in profound boredom precisely through their disappearance, their “telling refusal” in Heidegger’s terms. So, by pulling things out of their usual context and hanging Dasein out to dry in limbo, deep boredom supposedly cleaves open new configurations of existential meaning.

How then might the homeless addicts of *Itchy Park*, conspicuously stripped of their possibilities for living meaningfully, react to this call to actively retrieve these features of existence? As it turns out, for those people who are forced to endure the alienating political and material conditions of urban homelessness, Heidegger and Brodsky’s advice is all but impossible to follow. Instead of propelling them into the kind of resolute action that might “free” them from their situation, their ongoing sense of nothingness is so pervasive that Heidegger’s “message” simply cannot get through. Consequently, Larry and co find themselves severed from any meaningful temporal context – at once divorced from history and from any meaningful projection towards the future. Stuck in a limbo where nothing happens and nothing matters, their entire existence transforms them into a “nobody.” Max is especially pronounced in his sense of limbo, telling me that *‘we’re nothing to society, just ants to be stepped on. You know, like we don’t matter. Just a bunch of nobodies.’* As someone who is consciously able to consider his life situation in relation to the societal and temporal whole, Max shows himself to be fundamentally attuned to the realities of his existential predicament, aware that, in his current state, being a valued member of society – “a somebody” – is simply beyond the realm of possibility. Furthermore, this pervasive sense of insignificance is continually ossified and made gut-wrenchingly real through the temporal, relational and material conditions of extreme boredom.

Already on the verge of bursting, and forced to live in a world that already offers almost nothing of significance, the homeless simply cannot afford to let boredom “squeeze”

them anymore than it already does. Rather than operating as anything revelatory, the existential boredom experienced by *Itchy Park*'s homeless addicts serves instead to affirm their nothingness. For Heidegger, this incapacity to find one's way through to the other side of boredom and "reignite" existence constitutes a form of failure, an "inauthentic" means of being-in-the-world. From an anthropological perspective this conclusion is simply not acceptable insofar as it fundamentally neglects the myriad ways in which human beings are able to find moments of significance in the wilderness of an otherwise meaningless world. As Max puts it:

'When you become homeless, you become invisible. Life ain't no longer ahead of you, so you have to create a new time for yourself. This life, it's like a cancer. On the streets you have to drink, smoke, shoot up, whatever; it's the only way to get through the situation. If you start to intelligently reflect on the whole thing, it will become too much.'

For Max as with the other addicts I worked with, drugs and alcohol are often the only means of dwelling within the meaningless abyss of existential boredom. Max's imperative to craft a "new time" in the face of nothingness through mood-altering intoxicants is a reminder that selfhood, temporality and existential meaning can fit together in any number of ways, the configurations of which are intimately contingent on a person's social, political and material conditions. Indeed, this becomes immediately clear when we consider the often overwhelming tendency for homeless people to heavily intoxicate themselves as a means of "getting through their day." After all, how can people be so continuously, pervasively bored whilst being so constantly chemically warped at the same time? To rephrase the question: How can two seemingly divergent existential realities (deep boredom and narcotic transcendence) occupy the same body at the same time? Over the coming chapters, I am going to sketch out some potential answers to these questions, exploring how the anaesthetic experience of intoxication works to transcend the indifference of existential boredom – in which even a nobody can become not only a somebody, but a *somebody else*. I will put forward an alternative theory of homeless addiction that hinges on the idea that through extreme intoxication –

and under the right social, political, and material conditions – people absolutely can, and do, become *other selves*.

With these ideas at the fore, I am going to situate the existential boredom endured by *Itchy Park*'s homeless as part of a wider relational vacuum, in which the temporal bewilderment created by these existential conditions is intricately entangled with the tragic loss of certain key relationships. Working from the idea that the bestial excess of time experienced in existential boredom is marked simultaneously by the break(ing)down of a person's most significant connections, I will argue that the "killing" of time through drugs is inextricably linked to the desire to make sense of and work through the tragedy of personal loss – not just of intimate Others, but the very social, economic, and political worlds that formerly encompassed those Others. In order to make clear this link between the temporal conditions of deep boredom and the existential conditions of street-addiction, I will be re-articulating the addicted body as a kind of embodied relational network, in which the ghosts of the past take hold within and over the bodies of the living. This step should not be read as an attempt to exoticise the day-to-day realities of urban poverty, nor as a means of voyeuristically relativizing their suffering. Rather this thesis intends to show that in those transcendent moments where the knot is narcotically untangled and the ontological motor kick-started, the "flow-of-world" subsequently unleashed possesses an existential form so divergent from its precursor as to be an entirely different kind of *Dasein* altogether.

Chapter Three: Ghost Stories

Transforming the Cage

Before “the addict” entered our vocabulary as a noun in the late 19th century, its linguistic legacy was that of an adjective, used to describe ‘a state of serious voluntary bonding...that could be dissolved by circumstances or by the party who was “addict”’ (Saris 2013:269). “Being addict” – in the sense of being bound to something relationally – has since been subsumed into the internal bondage of “being an addict.” In the pages that follow, I will argue that the distortions of lived duration triggered through drugs and alcohol are better understood as creative acts of self-transformation that are themselves part of a wider psychic and ethical economy (in which transcendent spaces are continuously sought but never maintained); used by the homeless as tools to cope with the tragic loss of their most intimate relationships.²³ Ultimately then, this thesis is, to evoke Povinelli (2012), far less concerned with articulating “the Other” than it is with exploring “the otherwise” – that is to say the means by which alternative modes-of-being emerge within the given arrangements of the late-liberal order.

In exploring these ideas, I have found Jarrett Zigon’s (2014, 2015) relational model of ontology extremely useful. Adopting a Heideggerian perspective, he sees the subjective experience of being-in-the-world as constituted by our diverse entanglement with certain, ever-fluctuating exterior relationships. Thus any individual is always a relational-being, forever open to the shifting possibilities of a relationally-based world in which the dynamic mutuality between subjects sets the parameters for existence, itself constituted by the embodied connectivity that

²³ Furthermore, by investigating the ductile ways in which homeless addicts form and re-form their self-other boundaries I will be critically engaging with wider debates surrounding the historically pervasive “West vs the Rest” narrative of selfhood; in which the former is said to be fundamentally constituted by diachronic individualism and the latter by social relationality (Bird-David 1999; Bloch 2011; Lambek 2013; Scott 2005; Strathern 1987; Strawson 2005). Indeed, by looking within the bounds of our own “individuated” society, this thesis will challenge the authority of this West-Rest dichotomy, reaffirming Bloch’s theory of a selfhood “continuum” in which he asserts that ‘anthropology’s two kinds of people are nothing of the sort’ (2011:12).

reciprocally binds one being to another. This idea bears some similarities to Alfred Schuetz's (1945) notion of the "life-world," insofar as both models presume that meaning in the world emerges through intersubjective interactions that are always already composed of "multiple realities" – where each "assembled" context has its own relationally configured values, norms and demands. Zigon is especially concerned with the existential and socio-political forces that condition the ebb and flow of human morality, approaching it through an assemblage framework that has at its core relational-beings who affectively negotiate the plurality of a world in which they are always already embedded, in effect rejecting the neo-Kantian ideal that moral action must stem from autonomous rational decision making.

At the core of this ontological model are two intimately imbricated Heideggerian concepts I have covered in the previous chapter: attunement and disposedness – made manifest in the myriad ways through which beings cut across, connect to, and transform the relationships that constitute the potentiality of their social existence. Attunement and disposedness are thus the catalysts that drive relational assemblages and the ontological forms that they take. An attuned-disposed being, then, is a being that is already enmeshed in the matrix of specific relationships within a specific social world, and because subjectivity itself is predicated on the interlocking fabric of this matrix, it becomes possible for diverse human experiences to be given ontological status. Seen this way, a clearer picture emerges with regards to the way in which people find themselves and their choices already embroiled in a tangled web of relationships that do, and have, always deeply mattered. Ultimately then, a person's "disposed" attunement allows for multiple possibilities to co-exist in the same individual, such that one is always able to connect with other relational-subjects; be they animals, rituals, imaginations, discourses or even drugs. Thinking through Zigon's ontological model, we can start to understand how psychoactive substances – with their inherent power to create alternative states of consciousness – might also be included in a person's relational-transformational repertoire. To further elucidate this idea, I will now introduce what has, until very recently, remained a little known clinical study on the social dynamics of addiction.

The dominant theory of addiction – the “exposure orientation” – views drug consumption as conditioned by prior use, creating a powerful tendency toward continuous, compulsive usage. Like so many biomedical theories of behaviour spawned in the 20th century, the humble rodent was right at the centre of the clinical universe. The experiment was simple: take a rat and put it in the cage with two water bottles, one laced with morphine (medically and experientially interchangeable with heroin), the other with plain tap water. Almost every time the rat will fixate on the drug-laced bottle, coming back time and time again, often killing itself in the process. So there it was, proof that heroin, and by extension all drugs, are unstoppably addictive, proof that mere exposure to a substance is sufficient to engender a potentially fatal dependency. This is, let us not forget, the mainstream conception of the junkie – hyper-dependent vermin who will stop at nothing to get their next fix, even if it kills them.

However, in the 1970s, psychologist Bruce Alexander noticed a key structural flaw in the experiment, specifically that the rats were all alone in the cage, with nothing to do but take the drugs on offer. Alexander hypothesised that it was the cage, and not the drugs, that sustained the relative power of addictive pursuits. To test this hypothesis, he built “Rat Park.” Some two-hundred times the square-footage of the original laboratory cage, the place was rodent paradise. Within the cage were plenty of other rats, an abundance of food, tunnels, balls and wheels to play with, and enough space for that most rodential of proclivities; mating. Under these new conditions, the rats hardly ever touched the drug-laced water, and none of them ever came close to overdosing. Even rats that had spent the first 65 days of their lives in the solitary cages (in the process building up quite the “pathological addiction”²⁴) when they were moved into the utopian haven of *Rat Park* their desire for the morphine solution fell in line with the rats who had lived there the entire time. In another more extreme variation, the rats in solitary confinement were not even given

²⁴ ‘Isolated rats consistently drank up to 16 times more morphine than did colony rats’ (Alexander and Hadaway 1982:370).

a choice of plain water for fifty-seven days, forced to drink only the opiate solution so as to maximise the strength of their dependency. Again, when they were moved into Rat Park, they actively chose the plain water, barely touching the opiate solution. From this study, Alexander developed the “adaptive orientation” – the view that addiction ‘is an attempt to adapt to chronic distress of any sort through habitual use’ (1982:367)²⁵. In other words, it is not the chemical that causes addiction, but the cage in which a being finds themselves in. Stripped away from their most intimate relationships, it is my claim that the addicts of *Itchy Park* find themselves locked in similar kind of cage.

In Norman Zinberg’s (1984) terms, the encaged homeless addict is caught up in a twofold crisis of context, insofar as both the (*mind*)*set* (the mental state or mood a person brings into the drug experience) and the *setting* (the physical, social and cultural environment) are not exactly overwhelmingly positive, to say the least. As I have already argued, this feeling of being “locked in,” of being trapped inside a “knotted” situation, of being isolated and alienated, abandoned and forgotten, is ontologically and existentially pervasive. In psychedelic therapy terms, it is these kind of conditions that are likely to bring about the infamous “bad trip.” Unfortunately for the homeless, their circumstances seriously limit the extent to which “set and setting” can be recalibrated, providing them with a transcendental “roadmap” – to borrow a term of Timothy Leary (1970) – that is decidedly unidirectional in its itinerary. Indeed, like the isolated rats of Alexander’s experiments, London’s homeless addicts find themselves desperately trying to reconcile the tension between self and situation, ultimately forced to pursue visions of a better life through drugs, the crippling utopianism of which means that all such transcendent pursuits are viewed as so threatening to the social order that they are simultaneously transfigured into illness and crime – two incommensurable governmentalities that paradoxically interlock as a means of preventing, treating and punishing drug addiction all at once.

²⁵ For a deeper understanding on the analytic value of Alexander’s findings, see Stanton Peele’s (1998) investigation of the Vietnam War as a real-world version of the Rat Park experiments.

Furthermore, it is worth recalling that the crisis of disconnection explored earlier is bound up with the alienating temporal and political machinery of late-liberalism. Indeed, I have so far argued that these zones of socio-political abandonment are above all defined by the endless temporality of deep boredom, putting a knot in the flow of existence that must be continually disentangled, most often through drugs. However, as I have already intimated, this narcotic “loosening of the knot” de facto ensnares the homeless within the carceral biopolitics of late-liberal governance, rendering them at once patient and prisoner. This “double-sentencing,” whereby they must rehab *and* repent, means that a homeless addict’s ontological conditions cannot be viewed in isolation from the dynamic power relations that constitute the development of these conditions. This idea, whereby unique and singular divergent local realities form aspects of wider encompassing assemblages is what Zigon has come to define as “a situation.” Max and Larry know the realities of this particular situation only too well, insofar as their relationship with drugs has ossified their status as outcasts and outpatients, stripping them of agency, and in both their cases, throwing them in prison cells for their choices, which are, literally, cages.

In the sections that form this chapter, I explore what it means for a homeless addict to chemically transmogrify their cage through their *relationship* with drugs, focusing specifically on how the absence of intimate human relationships is ritually re-configured through the temporal liminality of the blacked-out body.

Haunted Houses: Remembering to Forget

The intention of this section is to show that it is no longer sufficient to explain addiction in terms of pathological determinisms. In what follows, my aim is to open up a conversation for thinking about addiction as a relational interaction between subject and substance. To review: if a human being finds themselves stuck in an isolated cage, dislocated from the key human relationships that once made their life meaningful, and made politically, economically and temporally destitute, that person

will invariably look to bond with something. Isolation on this kind of scale is constituted by a relational and temporal void that is existentially intolerable, in the process leaving a vacuum that drugs, as kind of ready-made psychotemporal relationship, are only too likely to fill. This chapter is dedicated to flushing this idea out with greater ethnographic and theoretical rigor. I will therefore be delving deeper into what I consider to be the inextricable enmeshment that sustains the existential conditions of homeless addiction – namely that between relationality and temporality.

Ultimately, this thesis is a study on the way that people use drugs and alcohol as means of simultaneously escaping and working through the haunting echoes of their past. In looking more deeply at the lived experience of existential boredom, the previous chapter made ethnographically explicit the way in which the past can haunt the present moment whilst simultaneously foreclosing future possibilities, the result of which is a sense of ongoing “stuckness” where nothing happens and nothing matters. This haunting, I am going to argue, is above all relationally driven, constituted by the tragic break(ing)down of a person’s intersubjective lifeworld. What we find then, is that the homeless of *Itchy Park* are caught up in a decidedly phantasmic relational sphere, insofar as their lifeworld is made up overwhelmingly of absences rather than presences – absences we might more commonly refer to as *ghosts*. Significantly, whilst relational breakdowns and bereavements are undoubtedly the “cause” for many of the problems people face across society’s spectrum, I make two key distinctions with regard to my experiences in the field: Firstly, the breakdown endured by my informants is not only intimate in the human sense of the word, but also socio-structural and temporal, the consequence being a rapid fragmentation of time as well as space. Eviction, in other words, is not just about being thrown out of a home, but being thrown out of time as well. Secondly, this thesis is equally concerned with the “solutions” sought by the homeless to deal with these problems as it is with their root causes. As will hopefully become clear, it is perhaps their inability to find comprehensive solutions to these “ghostly” problems that comes to distinguish them from their homeful counterparts. On the

park benches, I argue that the phantasmic should be treated neither as a figment of madness, an imagined construct, nor a metaphorical discourse, but as an affective manifestation of their social, political, historical, and material predicament, as an ontological reality that sets the very conditions of their being-in-the-world.

In a sense, this thesis is an investigation of “haunting.” In considering the haunting power of ghosts, I share an interest with Jacques Derrida (1994) whose observations in *Spectres of Marx* led him to the concept of “hauntology.” Coined to supplant ontology, it replaces the primacy of being and presence with the form of the ghost, that which is neither present nor absent, neither living nor dead. In this sense, the ghosts conditioning the lifeworlds of *Itchy Park* should be conceptualised neither as the individual poltergeists of Dickensian imagination, nor the sinister apparitions of contemporary Hollywood, but rather as the intimate imbrication between the structural violence of homelessness and the ongoing reverberations of personal loss. As such, the tragic ghosts that haunt *Itchy Park* do not exist as a representation of something that no longer exists – a simulacrum in Derrida’s terms – but as an invisible force that is embodied and continually endured, a lingering presence that possesses its own kind of social afterlife, an echo from the past that bleeds continually through the present all the while pooling uncomfortably into bittersweet lake of human memory. As with Navaro-Yashin’s (2012) “phantomic” analysis of social relations in post-war Cyprus, the ghosts of *Itchy Park* are not only embodied, inscribed into the flesh as it were, they are also to one extent or another *material*. They exist in and through the magical materiality of certain non-human substances, specifically drugs and alcohol. Conceived in this way, these ghosts do not just have force, but rather they *are* force. Echoing from the darkest recesses of background noise, these ghostly forces have come to colonise the endless stretches of empty time cleaved open by existential boredom, carrying with them *uncanny* traces of a past life that is no longer synthetic with either their present or their future.

A popular term in Freudian psychoanalysis, though by no means exclusive to this school of thought, the uncanny can be described as that which is simultaneously

alien and familiar. In this sense, the uncanny is intrinsically ghostly. This intermingling of the familiar and the unfamiliar is particularly salient for the homeless, insofar as it entails a critical disturbance of what was previously taken-for-granted – a home, a family, a job, a meaningful life. Coming from the German *unheimliche* – which literally translates as “not homely” – we can approach the ghostly sense of the uncanny felt throughout *Itchy Park* as bound up with an extreme form of “homesickness,” in other words a compulsion to claw back that which has been lost. Like a *déjà vu* stuck on repeat, the uncanny is a kind of constant reminder for the homeless, a reminder that they are presently alienated from their former way of being-in-the-world.

This chapter therefore marks an attempt to lure the uncanny out from its Freudian cradle and situate it in a specific social and political context, the aim being to theorise the uncanny as a relational and temporal form, interpreted henceforth as exerting a certain type of affective energy amongst *Itchy Park*’s homeless addicts. The filter through which I will explore the flow of these uncanny forces flow is memory.

For the homeless addicts I worked with, memory was the part of their being arguably most saturated with ghostly force. As an umbilical link to the tragedies of their past, memory was a conduit for uncanny energies that continuously seeped into the present moment, a haunted house unto itself. The memory of which I speak is not reducible to the “storage depot” of neuroscience and psychology, a space concerned only with the absorption and retaining of information. Conceptualising memory only in this way, as a subset of individual anatomy or else as a kind of invisible sponge that lies somewhere *within* the mind or body, obscures the myriad ways in which memory takes form *without* the immediate biological boundaries of the person. It is in these inter- rather than intra-subjective spaces that memory acquires its social, material, political, and ultimately its relational skin. In this sense, this thesis aspires to make a meaningful contribution to the “anthropology of memory,” insofar as the ethnographic accounts that follow are acutely concerned

with the ways in which social life and memory come together to constitute one another's boundaries. As a legitimate area of ethnographic inquiry, memory has become a powerful prism through which to evaluate the manifold and oftentimes contradictory complexities of social life. It is at once a performance event (Severi 2016), a signifier of historical identity (Sorabji 2006), a political ritual (Empson 2007), a scientific technique (Wagner 2008), a material process (Navaro-Yashin 2012), and an ethical negotiation (Carsten 2007).

As has already been suggested, one cannot talk properly of memory – be it neurologically, socially, or otherwise – without acknowledging its intimate link to the past. Indeed, to a greater or less extent it is our subjective relationship to the past that determines the shape and colour of our memories; colours that are shaded through the complex and ongoing entanglement between personal biography, relationality, temporality, socio-political situation, and material circumstance. What is often less considered when discussing memory is the role it plays in the imagination of possible futures. Viewed from this angle, memory is above all an indispensable synthesising agent, one which creatively rearranges the past as a means of forging continuity between past, present and future; that smooths over what would otherwise be deep and potentially insuperable disjunctures. However, as my ethnographic examples will demonstrate, under certain tragic conditions, memory often ceases to be a synthetic medium at all, its intrinsic link to the haunting echoes of the past so viscerally felt by the homeless that it is typically experienced as a kind of chronic psychic pain, an existential plight so overwhelming that it continually threatens the very integrity of their *being-here*, creating what Ernesto de Martino (2012) called the “crisis of presence.” From this perspective, memory is no longer a unifying agent but a potentially disruptive force, one that threatens the temporal flow of being-in-the-world. As such, it is possible to see the intimate way in which the temporality of deep boredom and that of memory can fold and loop into one another, in the process forming precisely the kind of existential “knot” described in the previous chapter.

In this sense, memory – understood here as the prime existential gateway through which ghostly forces stream hauntingly into the present – is very much built into the “problem” of homeless temporality. Indeed, Bergson argued that the self is itself a memory, experienced as an ongoing interruption in the flow of *durée*, forever filtering into the delayed feedback loop of self-consciousness. In this sense, the self, like memory, is always lagging behind the flow of the durative present; it is an afterimage, a *ghost* of *durée*. Antonio Damasio, a cognitive scientist, affirms this idea, noting that the present is always just out of the self’s reach, thereby proclaiming that ‘we are hopelessly late for consciousness’ (1994:240). Self-perception, therefore, is effectively always playing catch-up, the ongoing struggle of which we understand as the “effort” of memory or, to put it another way, the continual resurrection of past in the form of a belated self-image. Furthermore, according to Bergson, in order for the past to survive, ‘these images must continually mingle with our perception of the present and may even take its place’ (1991:66). Understood through the Bergsonian lens, since memory is not stored in any kind of material depot, be it the brain or any other organ, but rather is constituted by a kind of reflective circuitry, any so-called “gaps” between memory, self, and perception become more or less impossible to discern. It is for this reason that memories of the past really can be said to weigh down the present; to *haunt* it, as it were.

Faced with this particular dilemma – in which the past corrupts rather than consolidates the self-image – the obvious way to tackle the problem is to find a means of taking memory (and by extension self) out of the equation, to first disentangle and then banish it from consciousness as it were. Given the well-known powers of anaesthetic intoxicants to obliterate memory, it should come as no surprise that this is invariably the primary “solution” sought by the homeless of *Itchy Park*. More often than not these anaesthetic pursuits take a very particular form at street-level, known most commonly as “the blackout.” This state-of-being – best conceptualised at this preliminary stage as a kind of transient, chemically-induced

amnesia²⁶ – is something that all my informants experienced at one time or another; often on an almost daily basis. Accordingly, the blackout will act as one of the primary ethnographic and theoretical cornerstones of the entire thesis.

In rigorously unpacking the existential mechanics of the drug-induced blackout, I will look to explore the dynamic relational and temporal complexities of memory through its oftentimes hidden obverse: *forgetting*. In approaching this phenomenon as a radical kind of forgetting rather than a biomedical pathology I will show how the blackout constitutes a state/quality of being (a capacity) that satisfies a particular set of human wants (a utility) – specifically the simultaneous need to both kill time whilst also transforming and enduring tragic losses; losses at once structural and intimate. The point is that forgetting, so long as it is understood as one side of memory's Janus face, can be explored as a form of life unto itself. This idea chimes with one of Nietzsche's famous moral imperatives, namely that the past – in certain moments – ought to be sent into exile through the "active forgetting" of memories and experiences that might disrupt the flow of present and future existence. In this sense, active forgetting constitutes a kind of strategic disarmament of the past in order to circumvent the ghostly and melancholic echoes that invariably reverberate into the present.

Under certain conditions then, *it is forgetting rather than remembering* that can hold the power to creatively "smooth over" the disjunctures of the past, whilst at the same time carving out a way to live under the shadow of a limited future. In approaching memory through forgetting, I intend to shed new light on its oftentimes hidden complexities. Ultimately, I will show that the blackout has much in common with

²⁶ Drugs most associated with memory loss are those which increase the efficiency of synaptic transmission of the neurotransmitter GABA by acting on its receptors (most notably alcohol, barbiturates and benzodiazepines), sparking a progressive reduction in inhibitory neurotransmission in the hippocampus, the brain structure that is responsible for memory (Tsai and Coyle 1998). Although not a GABA drug, opiates such as heroin suppress the Locus Coeruleus, the primary producer over norepinephrine, a neurotransmitter that, among other things, plays an important part in the brain's ability to store and retain information (see Slotkin et al. 2003). With regards to my own informants, each and everyone were all heavy polydrug users, mixing opiates with alcohol (and sometimes stimulants) on a daily basis – the combined result of which was that a potential blackout was always just around the corner.

Bakhtin's logic of *l'envers* – *the inside-out*. In this way I will frame these wild binges as a turning-inside-out of late-liberal temporality, an embodied subversion of time that acutely disrupts the normal conventional distinctions of self/Other, past/present and presence/absence; in the process probing the blacked-out body for a political vein that has until now remained otherwise unexplored within anthropology.

The blackout will be explored in significantly greater depth towards the end of the chapter and beyond. For the time being it will suffice to say that this state-of-being is by no means a complete solution to the hauntological problem of the boredom-memory knot. As will hopefully become clear, throwing oneself into the narcotic netherworld of the blackout as a way to escape ghostly absences and allay the “crisis-of-presence” carries with it a fundamental contradiction, insofar as the transition itself requires a turning inside-out of presence so total that one effectively ceases to be a presence at all. In other words, to escape the pain of absence and “recover” one's presence from the jaws of crisis, one must paradoxically *become an absence*. The homeless of *Itchy Park* describe this process in terms of “becoming somebody else” – an alternative being that slips in to fill the void left by the chemically induced flit of memory, thereby subsuming a person's agency and rendering them a ghost unto themselves. In this sense, the blackout as an alternative mode of being-in-the-world – existing as absence rather than living as presence – cannot help but evoke Otto Rank's (2009[1914]) psychological motif of the “double,” itself a prominent theme of the uncanny. Like a mirror that reflects back only a shadow of the beholder, the Jekyll and Hyde quality of the blackout ensures that these addicted escape-artists invariably find themselves caught up in a situation arguably uncannier than the very one they were trying to flee in the first place.

Before returning to the park benches, it should be noted that my ethnographic material differs in some important ways from other anthropologists who have studied the haunting power of ghosts. By way of examples, my material diverges from the ethnographic accounts given by Heonik Kwon (2008) and Laura Bear

(2007), who both studied apparitions as integral aspects of historical consciousness that manifest themselves in the aftermath of socio-political crisis, in postwar Vietnam and along the railways of post-colonial India respectively. Likewise, I differ from Navaro-Yashin's (2012) use of the "ghostly" as a predominantly conceptual metaphor for thinking through the uncanny materialities, politics, and legal frameworks that "haunt" Northern Cyprus, choosing instead to focus on the way that ghosts can, under certain circumstance, ontologically condition a person's very way-of-being. Indeed, whilst there are of course similarities in my work that cut across each of these sensitive and beautifully written ethnographies, my understanding of the ghostly is more closely aligned with the labile spiritual forms of Pedersen's (2011) postsocialist Mongolia, said to emerge from the isomeric entanglement between the invisible power of spirits and the opaque forces of the market. Frederiksen (2013) captures a similar sentiment in his look at how disenfranchised young men endure socio-political and economic uncertainty in the wake of Georgia's free-market transition, exploring how the decomposing past of Soviet rule can be said to possess its own kind of social afterlife, the "unplanned" traces of which have bled into the future, transforming it into a ghostly and "over-multiple" horizon that continually forecloses certain possibilities for being in the present. Ultimately, I conceive the ghosts that roam *Itchy Park* as simultaneously structural and intimate, relational and temporal – *living forces* that operate as signatures for the abject conditions of their existence, inherently driven to disrupt the normal borders of inside and outside. Dislocated from the temporal and relational bonds that once made their life meaningful, these haunted souls turn to intoxicants both as an act of escape but also as an act of bondage, embodying these substances as a way of forging a surrogate relationship with those that have been lost. In this sense, I will explore how the tragic forces of homelessness in late-liberalism coalesce with the haunting losses experienced within this abjection to constitute the uncanny form of the blackout. I will show how under the right chemical, political and material conditions, the transcendent intensity of this drug-bonding is constitutive of an alternative type of body-being, one that is effectively "over-determined" by ghostly forces. In this way I will be exploring the "somebody else"

of the blackout as a kind of agentive transition that is infinitely closer to an instance of spirit possession than it is to an individual pathology.

Ghost Stories

I begin my analysis with three case studies that I intend to use as the ethnographic data for my relational theory of addiction. These, among others, will serve as a background for the discussion to follow.

Collette: The Run(a)way Model

'I wasn't on drugs when I was younger, with my first partner. He was really good to me. But then he died, car accident. And then my brother died not long after. It was a really tough time. A few weeks later I saw my brother again, you know, after he was gone. Sort of like a ghost I suppose, it's really hard to explain. I was just about to drift off, like when you're on the verge of dreaming, when something woke me up, a presence. I saw a shadow at the foot of my bed, but it wasn't against the wall, it was in the middle of the room. It was my brother. He didn't have any features; he was all black. But I knew it was him. I just knew. He pointed to the side of the bed and said "OUT." He was warning me not to start taking drugs. But I didn't listen, wish I had. That's how it starts, but before you know it's gotten hold of you' - Collette

In another universe Collette might have graced a catwalk or two. Her long spidery legs, narrow shoulders, twig-like arms, elegant neck and extraordinarily high cheekbones would no doubt have suited the eminently questionable ethics of size-zeroism that have come to capture the fashion-world's warped aesthetic imagination. But this is not another universe. Infinitely more run-away than runway, Collette beats a very different path from what might have otherwise been. In the wake of the double-blow of her partner and brother's death, Collette found herself shooting up heroin like it was going out of fashion. That was twenty years ago. The crimson lesions up and down her skeletal arms tell the tale of a deep and ongoing relationship

with the needle. It was the discovery of this relationship that saw her expelled from the family home, her parents and sister “embarrassed” by what they perceived to be the nihilism of her lifestyle choices; an “insult” to the memory of her brother, so they told her.

Expelled and addicted, Collette fell into the classic spider’s web of sex work, selling her body to fund an increasingly expensive heroin habit. Being a “needle-whore” – as many of the park’s male protagonists openly call her – has meant that her housing situation over the last two decades has been precarious to say the least. At the time of writing she is held up in contemporary accommodation in the Whitechapel area, but it has been commonplace for her to wind up on the streets from time to time. Spilling from one abusive relationship to the next, it was not long before Collette found herself pregnant. Already known to social services, it was thus in similarly quick time that her baby was taken into foster care.

Coming into the park one day I notice Collette sitting by herself, looking especially despondent, even by her standards. The whites of her eyes are bloodshot with fatigue, her irises overcome by the black holes that are her pupils. She is loosely gripping a can of cider in her left hand, all vein and bone; like she hasn’t eaten in weeks. I ask her how she’s feeling, offering to buy her something to eat. Her response is as follows: *‘I just found out my son died in a car crash, somewhere in Greece. Happened about a month ago apparently, my sister only phoned me up today to tell me. My mum and sister didn’t want me at the funeral ’cos they thought I might make everyone embarrassed. Wouldn’t fucking matter if I turned up with a bottle sticking out of my mouth and a hundred needles sticking out my arms, I still have the right to be there...to bury my own son.’* A heavy-smoker, her voice is coarse; her breathing shallow and violent. As she becomes more emotional over her son’s passing, her voice begins to crack, barely audible over the sobbing. Overhearing our conversation, Jimmy comes over to comfort her, telling her that she doesn’t deserve to be punished like this just for the way that she lives her life. He paternally grabs her left wrist and tells her to take another drink, to help calm her

nerves. Collette obliges. As she steadies her breath and wipes the tears from her cheeks, I ask if maybe she might consider performing a memorial service of her own. Collette tells me that she wants to get hold of his ashes, but refuses to make contact with the father – an *'abusive horrible cunt of a man'* according to her. She's just going to get wasted instead, she tells me; *'to get as fucked up as I can, you know? Take myself out of it.'* And so she does.

A few days later, Collette wanders back into the park. On seeing her I ask how she's been holding up: *'What? O yea, alright. It's been a bit of a blur really. Been getting off my face basically non-stop since I spoke to my sister. Can't really remember much. No idea what day it is. Any chance you can get me a cider?'*

Emma: The Star-Crossed Lover

There are certain echoes of Collette's tragedy in Emma's case, albeit in a very different form. Long before I personally met her, Emma suffered the kind of brutal compound tragedy that characterised so many of the life-histories I encountered over the course of my fieldwork. Having lost her mother to a hyper-aggressive form of breast cancer, in December of 2004 she also lost her father to the tsunami that tore through southeast Asia, killing almost three million people across fourteen countries. Brutally severed from her most intimate relationships, and with no other family to speak of, Emma found herself falling through the familiar trapdoor; right into the doldrums of addiction, sex-work and episodic homelessness. To compound matters even further, Emma was brutally raped whilst working one night. This, however, is not exactly the Emma I first got acquainted with. The Emma I knew for the first three-quarters of my fieldwork was a very different proposition. At some point, approximately a year before I began my fieldwork, one of Emma's clients had taken a particular fancy to her. Not content to remain "just a client" the man in question, George, became committed to extricating Emma out of her ongoing cycle of drugs and prostitution. As she describes it: *'He was the first person in so long who actually seemed to care about me. He was so kind, he got me to start eating properly,*

drinking less; you know, really taking care of me. I mean, we both occasionally do the odd bit [drugs] but only when we're together, and never too much. We come first, you know what I mean? Drugs, they're just a bit of fun now, something extra on the side. He really saved me, you know. Got me out of the hostel, into his flat. Don't have to work the corners no more.'

Collette supports Emma's self-assessment: *'You should have seen her before he [George] came along. All skin and bones, just like me! She was in a right old state. Smoking the pipe every day, drinking, shooting up – never knew where or who she was. A real fucking mess. He really got her out it, got her eating again, putting on weight. She looks great now. Lucky cow, wish something like that would happen to me!'*

Even though she had a place of her own with George, Emma continued to come into the park to catch up with people, to buy the gang the odd drink, perhaps share one for old time's sake. Either way she would never stay longer than an hour, as George would always come round to pick her up. Off they would walk down the high-street, arm in arm. Their love story is hardly Hollywood material, but it was the closest thing to a happy ending I had seen in almost nine months of *Itchy Park*. In any case, it appeared my romantic naivety had gotten the better of me. For as with so many lives that balance on society's marginal precipices, the threat of tragic collapse is seemingly always just around the corner.

For George and Emma, certain old habits died harder than others. So whilst prostitution and hardcore drug abuse had been left to the wayside, the occasional bout of public drinking was still an intermittent indulgence. Perhaps Emma would be the best person to tell the story:

'Me and George are having some drinks near Shadwell station. Us and the two dogs. You know, just having a few beers, minding our own business. Anyway, some bloke has walked past, seen us drinking and called us "white trash." So I've

thought, who the fuck do you think you are, calling me “white trash”? So I’ve turned round to him and called him a nigger – same fuckin’ thing right? Anyway, the bloke’s not happy with that so he’s gone and called the police. So the police come, and are being really loud and aggy. So the dog starts barking, and George is getting wound up as well. We just wanted to be left alone. Things are getting loud, and the policeman’s gone and taken out his CS-spray, and sprays it towards George. Why he thought he had to do that I had no idea, we weren’t being violent. Just disagreeing with him. The fucking spray has gone in the dog’s eyes, Bruno, and he’s pulled away from George and gone and bitten the policeman. So they arrest George for possessing a dangerous animal, done him for “assaulting a police officer.” Now they’ve taken Bruno away, he’s gonna get put down. “Destroyed” they call it. And George has been given three years. Three fucking years! For what?

George’s incarceration knocked the wind out of Emma in a major way. As she comes to the end of her story, she is trembling with sorrow. Unable to keep up with the rent on George’s flat, she is back in temporary accommodation, back on the drink, and back on the drugs. This is the Emma who re-emerged in the final quarter of my fieldwork – lost, isolated, break(ing)down all over again. During this period, it is a rarity to see Emma in any kind of sobriety. I quickly learn she has started working the corners again. Too sick to eat from all the booze and drugs, she rapidly becomes a shell (both physically and existentially) of the woman I had gotten to know over the previous ten months: *‘I wake up in the night screaming his name. Every day I think about taking my own life. [Talking to Lola, the other of their two dogs] Where’s daddy? Where’s daddy? In prison Lola, daddy’s in prison. Just me and you now. I’ve got nothing left. They’ve taken everything. I feel like I could die. Don’t care if I do to be honest. Drinking and that stops me feeling sick in the mornings. Need to get myself on a level so that I can be around other people, gets me through the day. This can, this right here, this is my partner now.’*

By the time that my fieldwork came to a close, Emma had become an increasingly withdrawn and forlorn figure. Often sinking up to ten cans of super-strength lager

each day, Emma was regularly slipping in and out of blackouts – determined to, as she puts it, *‘to lose myself, to get away from all the shit that’s happened to me.’*

Lisa: The Barrister

Walking down Whitechapel road in a straight line is more or less impossible. Between the sheer volume of people, errant cyclists and the volcanic appearance of seemingly endless roadworks, the act of walking is tantamount to a process of constant evasion. Trying to hold a conversation whilst engaging in non-stop ducking and diving adds yet another layer of complexity to an already mosaic task. As Lisa and I weave figure-of-eights in and out of the heavy traffic, I find myself impressed that someone so stoned can be so light on their feet.

Lisa’s methadone prescription runs out this afternoon, and she has asked if I could accompany her to the clinic – for moral support as much as anyone else: *‘The doctors have tripled my dose in the last couple of weeks, methadone, sleeping pills, and the anti-psychotics. When I take them all I can’t move, can’t go anywhere, can’t even leave my room in the hostel. I wanted to tell him last week, that it was too much, but he didn’t listen. He would just give me the scrips and slam the door in my face. I get really nervous in those situations – I just don’t really know how to talk to doctors, you know? I’m just not sure about all this medication sometimes, the way it totally takes me out. Maybe I’ll try and get off it, see how I go.’*

Lisa has also been prescribed strong sedatives over the last couple of months on account of her nightmares – incidents that have drastically increased since the recent death of her mother and grandmother; in conjunction with the immanent transferral of her son into foster care. A bigger chunk of Lisa’s story will be mined at greater depth at a later point in the thesis. For the purpose of this shortened case study, however, I wish to focus the attention on a few select elements of her life-history as they were articulated on this particular day trip.

Lisa's face is marked by a very particular scar running down from underneath her eye, down her left cheek, and falling past her chin. As far as scars go, it has something of an elegant curve to it, slender in its arc, and really *clean*, almost tonsorially clean – the classic sign of a blade. Knowing her history as a working girl, and having heard enough harrowing stories over the previous year to appreciate the hazardous nature of such an occupation, I asked if she'd acquired it from an unfriendly customer. Unphased by the intimacy of my question, Lisa rolled up the sleeves of her top, revealing beneath a helical mish-mash of similarly elegant scar-tissue, a veritable asterism of flesh-bound shooting stars. *'Did it to myself, didn't I. When I self-harm, I'm not trying to die. I'm just trying to feel something, to take some kind of control, you know?'* I ask her when she started to feel like things were getting out of control. Her response is as follows:

'I was living with my mum²⁷ and grandma. They were on the gear, as they always were. My mum, she used to serve up [heroin]; that's how she met my dad. I was doing a bit here and there, but not too much. I still had ambitions to be a barrister at that point, believe it or not. I was always really good in school, worked really hard, was really sharp. Maybe the drugs were already starting to fuck with my brain, who knows. I was with my partner, lovely bloke – took really good care of me. Anyway, he died all of a sudden. Car crash. Really fucked me up, you know? I started doing more and more gear, white and brown²⁸, you know. Anyway, after a while I started hearing voices. Not my own voice, but like his voice. I swear he was trying to talk to me. Like I could hear him, really clearly sometimes, but I could never actually pin down where he was. Eventually they must have thought I was going mad – got myself sectioned in the end. One of the doctors told me it was from doing too many drugs – think he called it drug psychosis? Something like that. And then another time, when I was in prison, I felt him again. Didn't just hear him this time, felt him...like the weight of him on me. I was lying in bed, totally awake, but I couldn't move, it was like someone was holding me down. I know it was him. Is that normal,

²⁷ Lisa's mother was also a working girl. Whilst this is not a source of pride per se, neither is it a source of shame. As Lisa herself puts it: 'I don't regret any part of my life. Made me a stronger person.'

²⁸ Street names for crack and heroin, respectively.

feeling ghosts holding you down? Anyway it was when I started feeling and hearing my partner that I started self-harming.'

As we walk further down the high-street, bobbing and weaving around its various emergent obstacles, Lisa asks me if I think she's crazy. I tell her quite the opposite, that I found the story of her partner as moving as I did fascinating. She confesses that she still misses him even to this day, and that with the upcoming surrender of her baby into care, these feelings of loss are only growing more intense. Sensing her growing emotional discomfort, I turn the conversation back to her medication, asking why she thinks the doctors have been so pushy with regards to her prescription: *'I think they're trying to up my dose so they can keep me off all the other drugs.'* Lisa's current methadone dose stands at 80ml per day. She often supplements this with an extra £10-25 of street heroin each day, plus some amount of crack depending in what she can get hold of. On top of this Lisa will drink super-strength cider intermittently throughout the day: *'The thing is, when the methadone runs out I drink, inject, smoke, whatever. It's just a substitute I guess.'* Forced into temporary accommodation,²⁹ hostel-living has its own set of social dangers, especially for a known junkie and sex-worker. As Lisa describes it: *'It's horrible living in there. No such thing as privacy, you never feel safe. Some of the guys in the block, keep offering me needles. It's hard not to do it, when it's constantly all around you.'*³⁰ *I'm quite an easily led person, you know. All that injecting on top of the methadone, can't keep that up or I'll be in trouble.'*

Before long we get to the *Specialist Addiction Unit* based out of Mile End Hospital. In the waiting room I see a few familiar faces from the park. Lisa is on first name terms with everyone, doing the rounds, offering out hugs, exchanging pleasantries. As we wait for the doctor to see us, the discussion in the waiting room quickly turns

²⁹ Her drug-related prison record in conjunction with her working as a prostitute make it practically impossible to tie down accommodation in the private sector, or even via the local council for that matter. As a result, the hostel she live in remains her only safety barrier against street homelessness. This, let me assure you, is ice of the thinnest variety - and that which people continuously find themselves plunging through.

³⁰ See Wadd et al. (2006).

to drugs – what therapies they are on, what has worked well, what has failed; blockers rather than methadone, aversion therapy etcetera. A young man called Wayne jokes that these waiting rooms always end up being like a *Narcotics Anonymous* meeting. The joke resonates throughout the space, returning to an otherwise unpunctuated silence after Lisa had finished working the room. Eventually we are called into the doctor's office. At first she is quite bemused by my presence, unclear exactly what my role is. I tell her I'm a friend, and that Lisa requested for me to be here. Lisa insists to the doctor that she let me stay, telling her that I am working as her "support worker." The doctor runs through her case history, intermittently asking lifestyle questions ranging from contraception to needle hygiene and everything in between. I encourage Lisa to share her reservations about the previous doctor's conduct towards her. The new doctor listens with what seems like genuine sensitivity. Lisa turns to me each time she asks a question, as if seeking my approval, my presence perhaps making her feel more confident in the role of patient. The doctor nods along, admitting that *'even though we're short staffed at the moment, you still deserve to receive good care.'* She and Lisa come to an agreement that she won't have to see the other doctor again. On receiving her prescription, we thank the doctor and take our leave. As we begin our walk back to *Itchy Park*, Lisa peppers me with anxious questions about her behaviour in the doctor's office: *'Was I alright in there? I wasn't rude was I? Should I have mentioned the other doctor? Did I say the right things? Did I sound stupid?'* I assure her that she has nothing to worry about, that all her questions were perfectly polite and legitimate. She thanks me for accompanying her, confessing that she felt much more comfortable in front of the doctor with me around. She tells me I should become a full-time support worker. I tell her that sometimes I feel like I already am. I ask her if she wants to get the bus back down the road, my treat: *'I can't use public transport. I used to be able to, but in the last few months I start to get panicked. My breathing starts to go; I feel like everyone is looking at me. I thought maybe I could get a bike, but I'm never in a condition to be able to ride it – don't know where I am half the time. I can only really go out within walking distant of my hostel. I guess I'm kind of trapped, you know?'*

Relational Breakdown: Locating the Tragic

Reading these three case studies through the biomedical lens, we would appear to have some incredibly sick people on our hands. *Rampant and seemingly insatiable polysubstance abuse, self-destructive tendencies, intergenerational drug sharing, broken dreams, physical decay, malnutrition, self-mutilation, psychosis, overdose.* These are the classic hallmarks of the addictive disease in full swing.

However, is it possible that our inbuilt assumptions about the “nature” of addiction might somehow blinker us to what the ethnography is *actually telling is*? Allow these case studies to speak for themselves, even just for a moment and suddenly things do not seem so cut and dry. *Tragic loss, the dead speaking from beyond the grave, spirits holding down the living, prophetic visions, talking with ghosts, falling in love with a can of beer, abandoning the self.* In shoeorning the lived realities described above into deviant or pathological categories such as “madness” or “disease,” we effectively foreclose the possibility of engaging with the existential conditions of homelessness on their own terms. To paraphrase from Martin Holbraad (2012), blindly accepting the conceptually “given” is effectively tantamount to a serious oversight; to beat the brave path the anthropologist must fully accept the burden of “conceptualisation,” insofar as the removal of these ideological blinkers must involve not only a radical break from his antecedent assumptions, but also the movement towards some new ones. In this spirit, using my fieldwork as a constant touchstone, what follows marks an attempt to “invent” a new conceptualisation of addiction – specifically a *relational and temporal* one. As the title of this section suggests, the fulcrum on which this attempt pivots is the already reverberant theme of tragedy.

Personal tragedy takes many forms and guises. Regardless of the varying forms that tragedy takes, each and every one will invariably threaten the integrity a person’s “ontological security” (Giddens 1991) – the taken-for-granted cohesive ordering, through habitual routine and interactional conduct, of the external world into the

subjective structures of being, not dissimilar to Bourdieu's notion of "doxa." According to Giddens, the continual inoculation against existential anxieties occurs through enduring bonds of emotional trust *between* human beings. It is this 'defensive carapace or *protective cocoon* which all normal individuals carry around with them as the means whereby they are able to get on with the affairs of day-to-day life' (1991:40). But what happens when this "protective cocoon" is ruptured through circumstances beyond a person's control? When the doxic armour of a person's psychic coherence is cleaved open by the social trauma of death, or humiliatingly mutilated by sexual abuse, to whom or what must a person turn to in order to repair the damage?

In answering these questions, I would first deploy a familiar, if slightly crass, existential observation pertaining to the predictably unpredictable nature of life: *shit happens*. The point is that modern life, especially within the hyper-dynamic and "risky" space of a sprawling urban metropolis, is defined by its instability and, increasingly, its loneliness (Beck 1996; Scheper-Hughes & Bourgois 2004; Shuster 2012; Wacquant 2009). The ups and downs of human existence ensure that everyone will experience bad news in their life – *(sh)it will happen*. That being said, as the most abject of late-liberal society's "failures," the homeless are forced to live in a space where not only does shit happen, *it constantly happens*. So whilst everyone will have to endure trauma of some description, for those at the top or even at the middle of the pile who enjoy sufficient emotional, social and institutional support structures with which to maintain their ontological security, often a trauma is experienced, to employ a medical analogy, as a non-displaced fracture or, to use the vernacular, *a clean break*. For those at the bottom, such as the urban homeless, the inescapable trauma – the unavoidable "shit-happening" – is often experienced as a *compound fracture*, where multiple traumas to the integrity of the ontological carapace happen at once or in rapid succession.³¹

³¹ This is not to say for a second that the "clean break" in itself is any less psychically or existentially distressing than the "compound fracture," but rather a person's socio-moral support network, that is to say the relational splint needed for "setting," is likely to be more robust both in terms of supporting the initial

The absence of intimate human relationships, then (what I have referred to in terms of “compound fractures”) is the key driver in my conceptual model, the aorta of addiction’s beating heart, so to speak. In each of the three case studies that began this chapter, and indeed in the ethnographic vignettes that foreshadowed them, the break(ing)down of their lives is constituted by the dissolution of their most vitalising human relationships – made manifest in the sudden and traumatic loss of family and/or partners, either through death, incarceration, or ostracism. Furthermore, it is invariably the disintegration of these human relationships that marks their expulsion, via their homelessness, from the “normal” chronopolitical regime. In this sense, the absence of meaningful human relationships is inextricably connected to the undiluted temporality of existential boredom.

Crucially, the “invisibility” of these relationships through their absence should not be confused with their disappearance. Rather, much like the phantom limb that develops in the wake of the lost body part, the absence becomes felt as an existentially palpable yet intangible presence. Thus the relational absence – this “phantom presence” – lingers awkwardly on the knife-edge between presence and absence in that the reality of the loss (the relational “fracture”) is mutually constitutive of the reality of the phantom; that is presence and absence commingle inseparably within an identical time-space. We see clear examples of this commingling in Collette and Lisa’s vignettes. In Colette’s case, her dead brother reappears as a penumbral presence at the foot of her bed, warning her (by pointing to the side of the bed and saying “OUT”) against her upcoming descent into heroin addiction – an admonition that was as cryptic as it was prophetic.³² In Lisa’s case, her partner returns from beyond the grave first as a voice in her head and then as a physical presence – one that literally held her down in her bed with such force that

fracture, and also of preventing the possibility of a chain-reaction type descent into more fractural situations.

³² Collette’s cryptic warning from her brother can indeed be understood as prophetic when we consider it in relation to Edwin Ardener’s (1989) usage of the term, whereby “the prophetic” is not so much about the foretelling of the future, but a specific reading of the present.

she was unable to break free. Lisa and Collette's experiences evoke the spectral forces described at the start of this chapter, chiming poignantly with Žižek's (2012) observation that the hauntological it is especially concerned with the way in which such forces act at a distance, of that which has causal effects without actually physically existing.³³ In another case, Liam, who lost his parents at a young age before being fostered by the children's charity Barnardo's, spoke of his own experiences of brushing up against phantom presences:

'You spend your life in Barnardo's, then you come out into the big wide world and it's just too much. You look around, you're on the outside, alone, no family. You see all these people pounding the pavement, going past each other, back and forth, it all became too much. So I blocked it out, you know what I mean. Blocked everyone and everything out. I'd walk into the mountains, into the forests with bottles of spirit, marking trees as I went to find my way back. Or else I'd just stay there for days or weeks on end...I'd keep cans scattered around the Thames, hidden, for when I needed them. I remember once I went to visit my parents' grave, I had been drinking and sleeping in the cemetery. I swear to God, I brushed up against a ghost in the midst. It was them. I felt them that night, for sure.'

Whilst not everyone will experience these ghosts in such Dickensian fashion as Liam, the fact is that each and every one of the homeless addicts I worked with were haunted in some way by the collapse of their intimate human relationships in conjunction with breakdown of their normal social and temporal frameworks. For Liam, as with Collette and Lisa, the absence of their loved ones has taken on something of a phantasmic quality – as something trapped in the limbo between living and dead. It is, as Domanska (2006:346) puts it, 'a past that haunts like a phantom and therefore cannot be so easily controlled or subject to a finite

³³ The haunting fusion of past and present intrinsic to Lisa's experiences also echo the magical realism captured in William Kennedy's *Ironweed*, in which Francis Phelan, a bum with a tortured and violent past, roams through the streets of Albany in an alcoholic haze, followed around by the "spooks" of those he has loved, not to mention those he has killed.

interpretation.’ In this sense, the lost Other is both continuous with the present and discontinuous from it, at once past and not.

For some, such as Max – who suffered extensive incestual abuse – the haunting first manifested itself in the form of self-harm (and later drugs, as we shall soon see). For others, such as Lisa, self-harm and ghostly presences develop both simultaneously and as part of one another. In Lisa’s case, that her self-harm arose as a means of existential “control” at the point when her partner’s phantom began haunting her (something that she ultimately felt unable to “control”) hints at the complex transformational dynamics that personal tragedy brings to bear on human relationships, specifically the contingent interplay between presences and absences as they inscribed, heard, felt and re-constituted through the body and its intrinsic relational sensitivity³⁴ – an idea that will be explored in much greater depth from chapter four onwards. In any case, over the course of my fieldwork, what proved especially preeminent was this hauntological pull of the *no longer*, described by Fisher (2012) as a “virtual agency” that enables the past to continue repeating itself, often in fatal patterns. Understood in the terms offered so far, a violent relational severance is not tantamount to the disappearance of said relationship, rather it sparks a particular kind of transformation. From an act of severance, Marilyn Strathern (1991) reminds us, there is always left a “remainder.” In this sense, the phantom remainder – *the voice in your head, the ghost on your chest, the shadow at the foot of the bed, the scar down your cheek* – can be understood as a paradoxical and uncanny synthesis between presence and absence.

Having ethnographically and theoretically established tragedy as a defining component of addiction in *Itchy Park*, I will now present what I consider to be a wider and more complex model of the phenomenon in question. The model

³⁴ Silverstein (2013) brings this idea to life in his study of the *Wororan* body, emphasising its capacity to reflexively mediate the interactive flows of kinship through different modes of sound. Each *Wororan* body operates as a barometer - an “indexical centrepiece” - the conduct of which is dialogically attuned to ‘the conditions of the social universe in which that body - and its regionalizations and partitions - takes shape and exists as an experienceable aspect of Worora selfhood’ (*ibid*:102).

displayed below is what I have called addiction's "relational-temporal network" – an improvised construction that lays bare the interrelationships that constitute the addicted bodies I encountered in the field. Critically, this model is not based on any one specific ethnographic example. Rather its construction can be understood as an ethnographic composite that captures the unique but shared existential conditions of the homeless-addicted "situation." Accordingly, this schematic approach is not designed to "capture" the lived complexities of addiction as such, solidifying them in representational amber as it were. Indeed, the point of this "style" of interpretation is to reveal the lived form addiction as a dense and multiplex entanglement, in which each point of the triangle is always simultaneously constituted by the other two points.

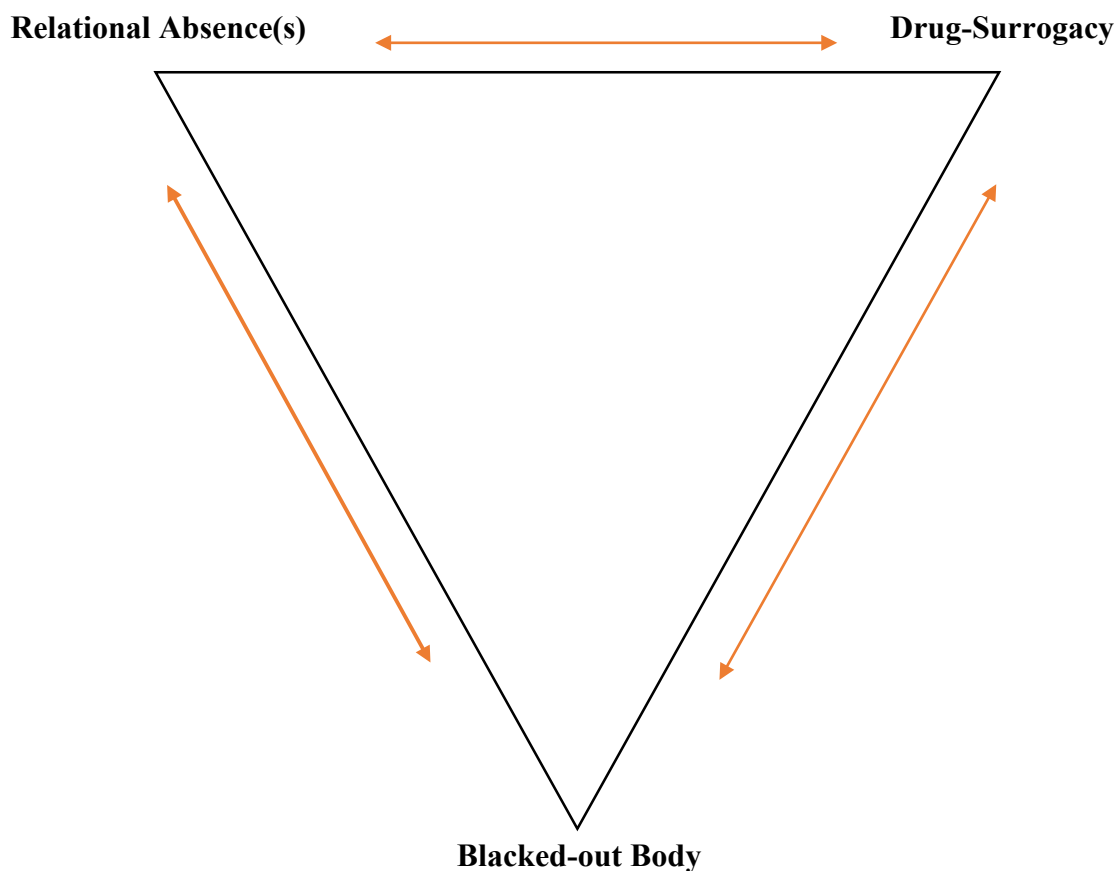


Fig. 1. – addiction's relational-temporal network

This section has provided the ethnographic and theoretical grounding for the triangle's upper-left tip, exploring how the “cutting” away of human presence(s) that constitute the compound fractures of tragedy do not eliminate the relationship, instead catalysing the formation of a new ghostly relationship, one that becomes sustained, embodied, and further transformed through narcotics – what I have termed drug-surrogacy. It is through this concept that I will now offer an alternative conceptual vantage point through which to challenge established forms of thinking surrounding drugs and alcohol, namely that their consumption is not about selfish dependence or cravings, but rather it is about the negotiation and paradoxical transcendence of ghostly forces.

Drug-Surrogacy: Melancholy, Mimesis, Metamorphosis

One thing that continuously emerged throughout my fieldwork was the frequency with which addicts referred to their drug of choice as a member of intimate kin. When an addict refers to alcohol as their partner, or heroin as their wife, this, I claim, is no simple act of symbolic substitution. One does not simply replace the relational absence with the presence of a drug, like-for-like. Rather, the drug and the relational absence are symbiotically intertwined in such a way that both become simultaneously transformed through the embodied phenomenology of addiction. In this sense, drugs are distinct from everyday materials, insofar as they possess an intrinsic “magicality.” The term, coming from Sartre, is used to describe creative, intimate, imaginative and even destructive ways that human beings connect to each other. In Kapferer’s terms: ‘The magicality of human beings is in their embodied passionate extension toward others and in their construction of the shapes of those realities to which they are directed and in which they are transcended’ (1997:2).

The reality is that the use of drugs in “magical” settings is hardly a new phenomenon. Indeed, the use of hallucinogenic drugs as a legitimate shortcut to divine truth has, until very recently, been pervasive across human history (Furst 1972). *Iboga*, for example – a psychedelic botanical used ritually amongst *Bwiti* practitioners in Gabon for spiritual transformation – is described by Fernandez (1972:246) as an “agent of transition” that mediates the movement across opposing ontological realities, specifically between the realm of the living and that of the dead. In this sense, the transformative power of drugs is somewhat captured by the Greek term *deinos* – used to describe the ambiguous, two-sided nature of life; that which is simultaneously terrifying and wondrous, divine and demonic (Staley 1985). Operating as the Janus-faced gatekeeper of liminal experience, it should come as no surprise that the altered states of consciousness that stem from drug consumption have often been interpreted as relating to the influence of alien spirits.³⁵

³⁵ From an anthropological perspective, it is no great revelation that certain objects possess greater transformative and relational potential over others. Indeed, in the Melanesian context, the kula canoe can be understood as a “transitional” vessel that both absorbs and radiates complex constellations of exchange

Faced with the uncanny return on the non-absent past in the form a phantom presence – what might herein be termed an *absent-presence* – the addict is thrust into what feels like a spiral of endless mourning. Freud (1917) articulated mourning as a psychic process that worked in terms of “reality testing” – whereby the mourner must progressively work through the pain of grief, to displace the lost love object until it is no longer held within the egoic carapace (Klein 1940). Only once this is achieved can the mourner move on with their life. In this sense, until the mourner is able to process their grief, life remains on hold. Melancholy, then, is what happens when the mourner is unable to take life off hold. Keeping these ideas in mind, we can, I suggest, frame addiction as a kind of radical embodied melancholia, thereby viewing the experience of intoxication as an attempt at creative revision in the face of otherwise painful trauma. However, before we can take this analysis further, a few clarifications on the subject will be necessary.

Despite recent modifications in the theory of melancholia, much of the Freudian baggage has remained difficult to dislodge. It is still implicitly assumed that melancholia works by locking the lost object in an affective echo-chamber that is tantamount to a kind of “intrapsychic tomb,” in which the loss is kept alive on a kind of respirator, a process that keeps the pain hyper-existent; “cryptifying” it, so to speak. This thus prevents the subject from gaining any traction on the present, anchoring them in a kind of psychic and emotional limbo (Abraham and Torok 1994).

Many scholars thus still agree that meaningful life in the present can only be re-acquired once the pain of loss is sublimated through efforts at narrativising the tragedy (Gibbons et al. 1998; Pennebaker and Beall 1986; van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela 2009) – be it through therapy or art – in which the dreadful past is “worked through” in a way

relationships absence (Malinowsky 1920; Mauss 1966) across divergent and continuously changing time-spaces, such that the absence of a physical body need not be synonymous with a spiritual absence (Strathern 1992). Whereas the kula canoe comes to contain an “excess” of presence - an overflowing of relationships - the drug comes to contain an *excess of absence*. In this sense, the drug-surrogate represents *the inverse* of kula canoe relationality.

that allows grief to relinquish its hold on the mourner. From this perspective, by dragging the past back into the picture through a carefully selected narratological frame, the mourner succeeds in laying his pain to rest. Failure to narrativise the past in this way is thus tantamount to a form of self-imprisonment, of sentencing oneself to the eternal entropy of melancholy. Echoing the critique offered by Angela Garcia (2010) in her work with heroin addicts in New Mexico, I feel this conception of the past – as a kind of psychic currency that can be strategically deployed so as to soften the blows of existential crisis in the present – to be somewhat unconvincing. This view of the past obscures the way that different social tenses and exterior relationships, social and material, are continuously bleeding into one another; it “individuates” the past tense in a way that ignores its fundamental capacity to inform, shape and at times disrupt human *presence*. For the homeless, the past is often a dark and painful place. And this is exactly how it is lived in the day-to-day trenches of homeless being, as a long and dangerous shadow that cannot be tactically “appropriated” on a whim. Not all past pain is open to sublimation, nor is it necessarily healthy to revisit the past if it only revives deep pain and trauma. Indeed, much of it continues to linger, to haunt the present, sometimes endlessly. In this sense, the pervasive atmosphere of melancholia that gripped *Itchy Park* was never purely “intrapsychic” in the Freudian sense of simmering somewhere below the threshold of consciousness. The lost love object was not “locked” in an unconscious tomb. On the contrary, these losses took on an intrinsically labile phantasmic form that haunted the park’s occupants at once from the inside *and the outside*, continually inscribing themselves into the very conditions of their existence: be it the lumpen physicality of street-living, their structural abandonment, their sense of temporal dissolution, their medical pathologisation, their criminalisation, and, most significantly, their drug and alcohol consumption.

Having established in chapter two that anaesthetic intoxicants are an integral part of the homeless person’s quest to “kill” the time of existential boredom, it is worth noting that what we currently understand as boredom arose historically from the study of melancholy, the earliest roots of which can be traced to early Christianity and a group of ascetic monks known as the “Desert Farmers” who, owing to their extreme isolation,

were often beleaguered by experiences of *acedia*, best understood as a deep feeling of listlessness which impeded them from fulfilling their religious obligations. This state of torpor was intrinsically linked to the presence of “the noontide demon” – a demonic apparition with the power to induce in them ‘a dangerous form of spiritual alienation’ (Spacks 1995:11).

According to Stewart (1991) demons such as *acedia* are externalisations of, or provocations to, a monk’s internal desires, which need to be kept in check or “fought against” in order to be good Christians. The fact that by the Renaissance the phenomenon of *acedia* had become subsumed into the secular concept of *melancholia* should not obscure the historical and cultural relationship between ghostly/demonic forces, boredom and melancholy. Indeed, in light of these ideas we might legitimately say that not only do boredom, melancholy, and ghostly forces “belong together,” but also that it is their particular coalescence in *Itchy Park* that produce the psychic, social, material and existential conditions that sustain addiction. Like the ascetic monks of the New Testament, the homeless addicts of *Itchy Park* are also fighting against dangerous apparitions; forces so uncanny and disturbing that living up to secular virtues such as “control” and “restraint” ends up being a nigh on impossible task. Indeed, it is because of these disturbing melancholic apparitions that the addict falls deeper and deeper into the drug-relationship, the drug’s anaesthetic temporality a temporary reprieve from the emptiness and misery of their daily reality. In this way the temporal reprieve becomes a kind of relationship unto itself, a surrogate relationship that partially insulates them from the ghostly ache of endless mourning. Paradoxically though, the amnesiac temporality of the blackout means that the moment of reprieve is, as an automatic consequence, reflexively inaccessible. Inadvertently then, drugs operate as a “technology” that intensifies melancholy and prolongs it rather than healing it, insofar as rather than “fighting” off the ghosts as such, the sheer weight of their haunting presence instead forces them to find an alternative way of living in the world, even if that means living as an absence.

The narcotic melancholia espoused here is thus arguably an inversion of the Freudian paradigm, in that rather than entombing the loss beneath the secret layers of the intrapsychic crypt, i.e. of camouflaging the absence by incorporating the lost object into the inner world of the psyche (through the twin peaks of denial and fantasy), the drug's magical power to induce radical temporal shifts instead *entombs them* within a kind of ghostly carapace, the protective layers of which are borne from the coalescence of drug-bonding and phantasmic haunting – a coalescence I have termed *drug-surrogacy*. By living temporarily as an absence – i.e. a ghost – the pain of loss is moved momentarily outside the limits of reflexive consciousness rather than festering on the inside as in the Freudian model. This runs counter to Abraham and Rand's (1987) classic text, in which they argued that the phantom – in their eyes merely an “invention” of the living³⁶ – does not belong to the “aha” of the ontological register, rather it corresponds instead to the unspeakable caverns of the unconscious.

Effigying Loss

Counter to Abraham's vision, I am proposing that the homeless are so *ontologically haunted* by these spectres that their descent into the temporal oblivion of blacked-out consciousness ceases to be a *suppression* of these ghostly forces, becoming instead a powerful transformation experience unto itself – bearing close resemblance to what might be called “mimetic performance.” Indeed, I argue that this experience constitutes a so far neglected window into the ‘wonder of mimesis,’ which, according to Taussig, ‘lies in the copy drawing on the character and power of the original, to the point whereby the representation may even assume that character and power’ (1993:xiii). In this sense, I am suggesting that temporality of the black-out seeks to preserve a partial connection with the lost Other through a kind of *mimetic doubling* – what might be described as the “effigying” of loss. I defer here to Joseph Roach's (1998) timely

³⁶ Roy Wagner, by contrast, would argue that it is the culture of psychoanalysis, with its implicit emphasis on the power of unconscious drives, that is the *real* invention – insofar as the psychoanalytic “culture” has fabricated within (and of) itself a set of conventions through which human nature (that is to say the workings of the mind and by extension the self) is ordered and made sense of. Suffice to say that if Wagner's anti-twin, anthropology's very one Wile E. Coyote, were to have read Abraham's description of the phantom he may well have quipped that in fact it is *the phantom that invents the living*.

reminder that effigy can indeed appear as a verb. Though that usage is distinctly rare nowadays, it means *to evoke an absence, to body something forth, especially something from the past*. Blacking-out will therefore be explored as a means of using the body to effigy the losses of the past. Furthermore, I will also show how the black-out provides a particular kind of bodily response to the caprice and uncertainty of the future, in the process revealing its significant political potential. Ultimately, this thesis takes the blackout as a state-of-being through which a person can “become Other” by losing themselves in the very thing that they effigy (or “expersonate,”³⁷ in Wagner’s terms). To this extent, the blackout can be seen as simultaneously mimetic and metamorphic. In other words, rather than burying the lost Other within themselves, the dissociative mechanics of drug-surrogacy turn the whole melancholic process at once on its head and inside-out, such that the addict ends up entombed within the uterine flesh of loss, becoming a ghostly Other themselves.

We see evidence of this idea in Emma’s words following her partner’s sudden and traumatic incarceration: *‘This can this, right here, this is my partner now.’* Dislocated from the person that had previously enabled her to meaningfully rebuild her life in the wake of her parent’s death and subsequent rape, alcohol *becomes her partner*; not as a simple chemical, but as a complex relational surrogate that simultaneously contains and re-constitutes her partner’s absence in a radically altered form. Drugs, in this sense, *give flesh*, albeit fleetingly, to the phantasmic forces encompassing the addict, insofar as the temporality of blacking-out kick-starts the gradual movement from imitation to identification with the ghostly being(s) that haunt them.

Once it is symbiotically attached to the drug’s uterine lining, the experience of the ghostly absence becomes fundamentally transformed from its formerly ethereal incarnation into something more sensorially embodied and ultimately, as we shall see, *more demonic*. The extent to which these ghostly forces can be understood as a kind of demonic embodiment will be explored more explicitly in the following

³⁷ This idea will be explored in greater depth over the course of the next chapter.

chapter in terms of *narcotic possession*, a transformative process that is constituted by the interpenetration of ghostly forces and political life in the age of late-liberalism. Ultimately, my exploration of the homeless-addicted uncanny is concerned with the way in which the invisible forms of phantoms and the indefinite forms of the market imbricate and coalesce – through the temporality of the blackout – to constitute labile bodies that exist at once inside and outside of time.

However, before I can address that part of the triangle, a few more reflections on the existential and relational mechanics of drug-surrogacy will be necessary. To this end, I offer up a particular ethnographic vignette, what I titled in my field notes at the time as *On Tour with Little Miss Grey*:

Early evening in *Itchy Park*, a few too many drinks down, and with most of the group splintering off to either beg or source more drugs, it felt as if my day in the field was drawing to a close. For one reason or another, I had resolved to finish off my beer, content to dwell in my surroundings and indulge in a bit of detached people watching. Across the park were a group of Somalis drinking and chewing their evening away. My (predominantly British) group viewed the Somalis with a level of suspicion, often lamenting what they perceived as their loud and combustible character, conscious that their volatile behaviour often brought to the park unwanted attention from the local authorities. Whilst it was true that over the course of my fieldwork, the Somalis did tend to fight amongst themselves more frequently than other groups, any such brawls were almost always kept in-house, and often very short-lived. In any case, it was generally accepted that they preferred to keep themselves to themselves, and never before had they showed any inclination to come and drink at our particular corner. So it came as something of a surprise when Miss Grey came staggering over, can in hand, eyes glazed and wild, and asked me outright if I thought she was black. Given how little time I had to summon a response, and feeling somewhat blindsided by the bluntness of her questioning, I chose an honesty-first approach and simply replied: ‘Yes. I think so.’ Hearing my response, Miss Grey let out a piercing cackle as her torso folded over her knees in

dramatic hysterics, sending beer and cigarette ash flying indiscriminately through the air. *'I'm too black, you're too fucking white. I prefer the middle. Mixed race – like my babies. Let's go, we're going for a walk.'* And so, before I could muster an objection, Miss Grey pulled me up from a bench and we began an impromptu walking tour Whitechapel's back-streets.

Walking arm-in-arm, Miss Grey is nothing short of a force of nature. Accosting anyone who walks within her reach, she tries to strike up a conversation, loudly pointing out people's skin colour as they go past. Swigging from a can of *Special Brew* and visibly drunk, those who see her coming swap to the other side of the road. Those who don't inevitably find themselves lurching back in disgust as she launches herself upon them and tries to kiss their hands. At one point she walks past a shop, taking a pair of sandals from the outside display and puts them on her feet, flinging her former shoes in the middle of the road declaring them *'now fit for summer.'* In between moments of unsolicited public hand-kissing/racial commentary, Miss Grey tells me non-stop about her descent into alcoholism following the transferral of her three children into her sister's care that occurred in the wake of her husband's death. Given the public setting, relative state of intoxication and downright bizarreness of the situation, our conversation could at best be described as fractured and disconnected, marked by alcoholic incoherence and linguistic barriers as much as anything else. Nevertheless, Miss Grey offered up one particular monologue that bears repeating, especially in reference to this section's focus on drug-based relational surrogacy:

'They took my babies from me. My husband he got me pregnant three times. After the third time he died. I was a single mother for 11 years. After a while it was too much pressure. I started to drink. The English government says that you cannot be responsible when you drink. I only started in 2013. I started in secret hiding it. It is not good for women to drink. I am an alcoholic. A bad person. I am jealous of life. They gave my babies to my sister. My sister is the boss, England is the boss, I am nothing. Alcohol is my family now, my special baby [She slaps the can affectionately,

at one point beginning to kiss it as well]. *I hate it though. I want to stop. How do I stop? Can you help me? If they give me my babies back, I go to Heathrow and fly back to Africa. If not then I don't want to live. If you give me a gun, I kill myself. I can't be around my family, they don't drink. Alcohol is my family now.*'

Pulling the Umbilical Cord

With her husband dead and her children taken from her, Miss Grey explicitly tells us that alcohol has become her kin. This moment, where *Special Brew* transubstantiates into a *special baby*, lays bare the mimetic-metamorphic process of drug-surrogacy, in which the chronic ingestion of the drug, with its intrinsic temporality, begins to contain and transform the absent relationship(s). By no means then, does the process of surrogacy amount to any sort of “clean break” from the lost relationship. On the contrary, the absent relationship and the drug should be seen as seen as umbilically linked through the ongoing process of intoxicated metamorphosis. In this regard, the drug-surrogate can be conceptualised as an isomeric form of the initial relational absence – *the remainder of the remainder*, in Strathern's terms.

There are echoes of this transformative process in Rebecca Empson's (2007) ethnography of Mongolian kinship, whereby certain bodily fragments (locks of hair, pieces of umbilical cord) constitute presences for those who are physically absent. In the Mongol context, these “hidden objects” have been removed from people at significant moments of separation. As such, these objects constitute a cosmology of “shared blood” that operates through an ontological pathway that Empson calls “umbilical communication.” In times of great politico-economic instability, in which men often leave the family home for long periods at a time, the bodily fragment – as an element of the whole – can thus be seen to contain the “animating essence” of that person. In this way, by creating distance and splintering a part of the body, ‘a liveable version of the relation is formed’ (*ibid*:124). Significantly, however, Empson notes how these fragments, understood as the objectification of specific relations, sustain “the possibility of return.” This, then, is what separates the

Mongolian fragment from the drug-surrogate: whilst the bodily fragment cultivates absent relations into an existence of profound and rebounding presence, the drug-surrogate can only transform the absent relation into an even more profound and haunting absence – the *effigy*.

Furthermore, it is worth pointing out that Miss Grey's assertion that alcohol has become her (lost) family is not an isolated example; on the contrary, it is utterly typical of a person who has undergone the compound fractures that appear built into the conditions of homeless addiction. The means by which the melancholic subject finds herself entombed within the flesh of loss is wrapped up in the complex temporality of psychoactive substances, an idea that will be significantly substantiated in the next chapter and beyond. Indeed, it is this complex temporality that sustains the alternative existential musculature of the blacked-out body. Before we breach that tip of the triangle however, we must first delve deeper in what it means *to effigy loss* through the temporality of drugs and alcohol (all the while still remembering that each of the triangle's three tips are at any point continuously co-constituting one another).

Viewed through the metaphor of surrogacy, it is useful to imagine the drug as a kind of uterine lining that absorbs and reconfigures absent-presences, insofar as they are able to perform a transformation that is at once visceral and aporetic;³⁸ that is they invoke the presence of (an)Other whilst simultaneously confirming their absence. Walter Benjamin evokes this paradox when he talks of the “auratic” condition of photographic time, as ‘living beyond your own death in a sense’ (de Man 1986:85). Drug time carries within it a similar sense of this beyond – *escaping* a loss that has already been suffered, and yet paradoxically “doubling” the same loss by mimetically “living” and embodying its very absence. However, unlike the photograph that survives the loss of its original object by becoming independent of it, the drug can only escape the original loss by transformatively containing it, the risk of this symbiotic interdependence being that the addict is invariably thrown into

³⁸ In the wake of tragedy, one is quite literally “at a loss.”

the risky space of anaesthetic time where their own agency³⁹ goes on behind their back.

Corporate Restructuring

At this point we are faced with another reconfiguration of classic psychoanalytic theory: If taking a drug in the wake of loss is an act of *incorporation* in the Freudian sense, then the actual psychoactive *consequences* of the drug on subjective consciousness – articulated here in terms of surrogacy – are undoubtedly are an act of *re-incorporation*. In other words, the addict *effigies* the lost Other by giving it a corporeal host: the mimetic and “doubled” flesh of the blacked-out body. Under these metamorphic conditions, the addict strikes a perverse bargain with the lost Other, offering up their own body as a tomb in which they will momentarily allow themselves to be entrapped, a living breathing medium through which the phantom’s previously dicey presence among the living can be bodily transfigured and then uncannily doubled. Keeping in mind the pervasive manner in which feelings of absence and loss permeate through their ongoing social and political abandonment, I suggest that conceptualising the blacked-out body as a kind of living effigy (or an effigy that is lived) is necessary if we are to understand the way in which people remake intimate relations in the wake of tragedy, and in particular how the dead and absent are kept “alive” and “present” through drugs and alcohol.

To re-cap then, drug surrogacy is the means through which the *absent-presence* of the phantom begins its transition into becoming a *present-absence*, one that is lived and experienced through the ghostly liminality of the blacked-out body. Put another way, the mechanics of drug-surrogacy ensures that what is embodied is the *absence* of the lost relationship, not the *presence* of the lost object, in the Freudian sense. As a consequence, the moment that the drug begins to mimetically contain and transform the

³⁹ It should be noted that any questions emerging at this point relating to the temporal conditions of agency cannot yet be examined with the requisite theoretical and ethnographic rigour. Suffice to say that for now such questions will have to remain latent, their exploration part of the wider investigation into the murky spaces between agency and memory that form the second half of this thesis.

loss, the relationship between addict and drug is also fundamentally transformed – insofar as the addict finds himself *experiencing and living the* absence rather than *recovering the presence* – what will be analysed in due course as a form of spirit possession.

In Miss Grey's case, the can of lager that she kisses and caresses, truly is a *special baby*. Caught in the drug's surrogate womb, her lost babies are rendered *stillborn*, relatable to her only as a kind of torturous absence. In this sense, the complex intimacy of a former human-human relationship is re-articulated into an existentially tormenting, paradoxical relationship between addict and ghost, prompting the person in question to forge a deep and embodied (partial) bond with an unending human absence, the material presence of whom is constituted and re-corporated through the anaesthesia of drug-bonding.⁴⁰

Having analysed the upper two tips of the triangle, thereby exploring the initial means by which drugs, phantoms and the body co-entangle to create alternative states-of-being, I now recentre the analysis to questions of the body. A more nuanced understanding of the body, especially with regards to the way in which it is relationally and temporally constituted will be vital as I look to articulate the blacked-out body as an ethical and political instrument. Consequently, to understand the uncanny process by which drugs mimetically double the phantom/absent-presence through the mechanics of narcotic surrogacy, it is necessary to understand the way in which psychoactive substances “ritualise” the body.

Ritualising the Body: The Crisis of Presence

It is an established idea in anthropology that ritual, because of the particular way that it transforms and reconfigures self-Other relationships (Bateson 1958; Boddy 1994;

⁴⁰ As Nick, homeless for the last five years and a big fan of injectable heroin, puts it: ‘The drug, it’s like your friend, your lover. It’s like waking up and being cuddled by a loved one...until that love fades and then you have to go out and find some more. Like I told you; addiction - it’s like peeling away layers of an onion, only the more you peel away, the more layers you find. You never truly find what you’re looking for, but it doesn’t stop you looking.’

Kapferer 1991; Houseman & Severi 1998; Napier 1992), can be said to possess a redemptive and therapeutic power; a means of “healing” those who, for whatever reason, find themselves disconnected from the normal fabric of everyday life.

In thinking through the healing powers of ritual, I have found the work of Ernesto de Martino (2012) to be instrumental, specifically his intertwined concepts of the “crisis of presence” and ritual “dehistorification.” Taking them up in order, the former refers to the moment where the possibility of ceasing to be reaches a critical point, such that the very relationship to our own finitude gets thrown right out into the open. With regards to the latter, to be dehistorified is, in short, to be thrown out history into alternative temporal realms where the normal bonds of subjectivity and society no longer apply. In what remains of the chapter, using the conceptual models provided by de Martino, I will explore how drugs and alcohol facilitate and actually stream-line the construction of alternative spaces-of-being for those in the throes of existential crisis.

For de Martino, being-in-crisis disrupts the subjective capacity to synthesise past and future into a negotiable presence, partially dislocating the individual from normal social and historical rhythms. It is a temporal incapacitation that “dehistorifies” the sufferer – removing him or her from the synthetic coalescence of history and putting a knot into the flow of existence, a malaise that can take the form of uncontrolled mental states and illnesses. People in this position, de Martino argues in his ethnographies of Southern Italy, seek restitution from the menace of psychic collapse through the transformative space of institutionalised religious ritual. These spaces address the condition of unsolicited dehistorification by, paradoxically, displacing the sufferer from historical time altogether and situating him/her into “the beyond” of mythic or metahistorical time where the condition can be confronted. Under the care of culturally ordained authority figures, the sufferer is transported into the timeless arena of metahistory, a process that actually *deepens* and intensifies the ataxia of dehistorification by virtue of *an even greater step* out of history. Counterintuitively then, it is precisely this “total” dislocation into the beyond – itself

a time out of time – that enables the subject to re-acquire the present and re-establish themselves as an active presence in the world. As de Martino puts it: ‘the metahistorical level, as a horizon of the crisis’ establishes an alternative space of existence and ‘allows one to “be in history as if he weren’t in it”’ (de Martino 2012:78).⁴¹ Using his model, this tractive moment of dehistoricification will be shown, through ethnography, to constitute part of a repertoire of existential imperatives that underwrite the (partial) recovery of the addicted self in the face of crisis.

With respect to the tragic cases that have so far made up this thesis, de Martino would argue that these people – should they wish to be healed – must submit themselves to the dehistoricifying power of ritual, the mechanics of which I have sketched out above. Furthermore, in de Martino’s ethnographies, as the subject seeks to save himself from the ever-present threat of psychic disintegration he/she enters the ritualised space primarily through the guidance of culturally anointed authority figures, such as healers or shamans. This notion, that rituals tend to be regulated by guides or sponsors (as well as possessing their own intrinsic temporality) is nothing new. In fact, it is something of a time-honoured idea within the discipline (van Gennep 1977; Turner 1969).

⁴¹ For those familiar with the early video games of the late 70s and early 80s de Martino’s conception of dehistoricification could be illuminated by comparison with either the “warp-portals” of the *PAC-MAN* maze or the “hyperspace” button in *Asteroids*. In the case of the former, in those moments where the hungry ghosts are closing in from all angles, the PAC-MAN – facing a serious crisis of presence (Game Over) – dehistoricifies himself by throwing himself “off-maze” through a warp-portal that stands apart from the normal flow-of-being that constitutes the in-game. In this moment, PAC-MAN “the presence” is no longer visible, rather his being has been displaced into a world that lies beyond the confines of the maze. In this sense, by stepping through the portal and into the metahistorical “off-maze” space, he becomes PAC-MAN “the absence.” However, it is paradoxically by becoming an absence, by taking an even bigger leap out of history, that he is able to reacquire his presence, in the sense that he *re-appears on the other side*, a side that, for the time being, is not full of predatory ghosts desperate to consume him. Likewise, in the latter example, the hyperspace button allows the player, when under threat from asteroids and in imminent danger of destruction (Game Over) to disappear off the map altogether (i.e. out of history) and reappear moments later in another position, a random position but not one of immediate danger (although there is always the risk of reappearing on top of a new asteroid), and from which the whole process of negotiating danger must begin again. The move into hyperspace, like the move into the “beyond” of the “off-maze” are one in the same; moments of metahistorical dehistoricification that establish alternative spaces of existence, allowing the player to re-acquire presence from the jaws of crisis. Significantly, in the case of PAC-MAN, there is another means of negotiating existential crisis, the *power-pellet*. The significance of this alternative redemptive method will be explored in greater detail in the next chapter.

That being said, within modern society, these ritual healing structures – along with the stewards that guide them – are very much on the wane, almost non-existent in some areas, particularly in urban settings such as London (Napier 2004). Crucially though, an absence of structure is not the same as an absence of desire. Indeed, the exigency to transform and heal the self through Others is, Napier suggests, as strong as it ever was. The problem, he claims, is that – owing primarily to an overarching ideological fear of Otherness – we now fundamentally lack the institutional structures (and personnel) to put this kind of Other-led healing into action. As I hope to have shown, for the homeless addicts of *Itchy Park* the need to heal psychic and relational wounds could not be more pressing. So my question is this: in the absence of sacred figures and established ritual institutions, how can the cauterising of psychic wounds through “dehistorifying” transcendence be performed, if at all?

This thesis, and the ethnographic accounts that underwrite it, is an attempt to answer this question. Ultimately, my central claim in this chapter is that it is precisely *because* of this unsatisfied need, this deep unmet existential urgency, that the homeless are left with no option but take on the healing responsibility themselves, to become their own redeemers, so to speak. Furthermore, in being forced by their social conditions to take on this particular existential burden, I argue that their bodies, as the only “thing” they have left, become both the site and the enactor of the ritual process.

The Death of Rebirth

In his relatively little known work *Drugs, Addiction and Initiation: The Modern Search for Ritual*, Luigi Zoja (1989) offers a psychoanalytical exploration of the role of drugs in modern life. Adopting a Jungian tone, Zoja argues that modern man seeks, above all else, the possibility of spiritual rebirth. Lamenting the relative disappearance of sacred *rites de passage* in the late-modern epoch, Zoja ultimately views drug use as symptomatic of deep unconscious urges that are not satisfied by

modern consumer culture, suggesting instead that the seductive fantasies of the drug-experience expose a universal need for initiation. In his eyes, the addict, through their drug of choice, seeks the kind of rebirth that is archetypal of initiation rituals. This deep unconscious desire, Zoja tells us, is not pathological in itself. What leads to the “vicious cycle” is that late-modern culture provides precious little institutionally sanctioned spaces in which to meaningfully experience the death-rebirth process that he claims to drive all initiation rituals. Consumption, he argues, has filled the sacred void where initiation rituals used to be. So, in a society devoid of initiatory rites, the addict craves not so much the ecstasy of the high as the thrill of participating in the dominant religion of the age: consumerism. As the dark side of consumerism, the “pathology” of the junkie is but a mirror into an invisible cavity in the wider culture. Inspired by Jung’s reading of Lévy-Bruhl,⁴² Zoja’s analysis of “the drug problem” suggests that this primal need for existential revitalisation is activated not only in the individual but in society at large, by a collective drive for “participation mystique.”⁴³ The deep urge to transform the self through death and rebirth, which Zoja sees as the cosmological and existential heartbeat of all ancient initiation rites, therefore drives the urge to take drugs.

From the perspective outlined above, drug addiction operates as kind of self-contained initiation ritual, taken on as a means of redressing that which is absent in the culture at large. However, under these isolated conditions in which the drug is no longer a means but an end in itself, Zoja suggests that the user essentially becomes “stuck” in the death phase of the rebirthing process, effectively inverting the initiation structure such that the destabilising “suffering” that transforms death into rebirth becomes, like a skipping record, ensnared and perpetuated in the vicious cycle of addiction. Speaking of modernity in more general terms, Napier offers a similar critique of consumer culture, arguing that human beings have become

⁴² For a closer look at how Jung used Lévy-Bruhl’s concept of participation mystique to theorise the unconscious of “archaic man” see Segal (2007).

⁴³ Zoja does not see the drug induced “escape” from the brutalities of life as “cop-out”, rather he sees the urge as an attempt, ultimately deficient, to live within it. From his perspective, the addict is impelled by the utopian fantasy that the drug will catalyse death of the old and resurrection into a new and more meaningful modality of existence.

increasingly closed off from the risk-laden potential of what he calls the “selective dissociations” that drive ritualised experience, whereby “transformational change” is the result of a destabilising moment (a “levelling out” of individuality) - one which takes the form of an emotionally fragmentary state within which the self is not the sole pilot of its own destiny.

Whilst Zoja’s argument represents a novel and welcome break from most accounts of addiction, his somewhat narrow conception of ritual ultimately prevents his argument from reaching its considerable analytic potential. His conception of ritual/initiation is essentially a repackaging of van Gennepe’s (1960[1909]) “universal” *rites de passage* – complete with all the familiar Turnerian associations of *communitas* and *anti-structure*. Houseman & Severi (1998:169-197) are especially critical of van Gennepe’s model, suggesting that the very ‘persuasiveness of the rite of passage structure undermines its analytical usefulness[...]. At this level of generality, most of the distinctive structural properties of particular ritual events are lost, and the usefulness of the idea of an overall ceremonial form is very limited indeed.’ Kapferer (1991) levies a similar charge, suggesting that in its attempt to offer a universal template for all ritual, it severely limits its capacity to account for the distinctive form, or “style,” of specific ceremonial events.⁴⁴ Zoja’s model, lacking as it is in any kind of description pertaining to the formal properties of ritual events (drug-based or otherwise), fails to acknowledge the way that structures of practice shape the distinct “totality” of ritualised action. If Zoja’s framework is to gain any traction in an anthropological account of addictive pursuits, we must turn our attention to that most intimate feature of human action in general, and of ritual action especially, that too often flies under the symbolico-functionalist radar, specifically that such actions are not only aesthetically and semiotically constituted,

⁴⁴ For a further examples of universal structural templates for ritual action, see Bloch’s (1991) concept of “rebounding violence” – a framework that Houseman & Severi (1998:176) critique as the eversion of van Gennepe’s model: ‘Both models describe a transformative process in which the continuous and discontinuous aspects of the relationship between initial and final stages are integrated into a single hierarchical dynamic.’ In the Turnerian model, the transformative processes are located in the medial/liminal phase, whereas in the pattern of rebounding violence, they are to be found in the rituals initial and above all final phases. Houseman and Severi, on the other hand, feel that the transformative processes of ritual are derived from the formal scheme itself.

but also *relationally*. This point, made explicit by Houseman & Severi, is that the “lost” archetype of initiation was always relational in its composition; that there is no such thing as a “non-relational” ritual. Likewise, the existential value of the death/rebirth process lies in dying/rebirthing *through Others*. In this sense, the drug ritual is not really “self-contained” as Zoja would put it; rather it contains within it a self that is constituted by a nexus of ongoing (mostly absent) relations, the interlocking form of which takes shape through the disruptive temporality of intoxication.⁴⁵

The reality is that all the “self-healers” I met in *Itchy Park* were looking to enact some kind of transformation, some kind of change. In an ideal world they would have changed the abject and alienating conditions of their life situation. This being pretty much out of the question, they were instead forced to change themselves. One of the main forces driving this desire for change is, ultimately, hope. Crucially though, this breed of hope is tangled up with a particular kind of despair, best encapsulated by the position of *the bargainer*; the idea that “if I do this, then maybe that will happen.” Faced with the unenviable prospect of having to heal wounds as quickly as they are inflicted, the addict keeps at it with the bargainer’s hope that maybe, if they transform themselves sufficiently, something might happen.

The Temporality of Intoxication

Having established de Martino’s model of ritual dehistoricification as a key theoretical scaffold, I will shortly begin to ethnographically explore the ontology of the drug-induced blackout; rearticulating it not as a biomedical condition/pathology, but as an act of *embodied dehistoricification* in which the addict paradoxically salvages his precarious sense of presence by becoming and living as an absence; or, more specifically, *anOther Self*. In order to take this step, I will be engaging with extreme

⁴⁵ In this sense we can think of addiction in terms of a “logic of relations” over a “logic of substances.”

drinking and drug-taking as a specific “style”⁴⁶ of ritualised action, constituted by the relational and temporal nexus it brings to the foreground. Accordingly, something of a detour will be necessary, into what might be termed “the temporality of intoxication.”

So far, the central claim of this thesis has been the idea that addiction amongst the homeless is driven by the haunting echo of certain absent relations – relations that are at once intimate and structural. Having explored at length the existential interplay that occurs between addict and substance, specifically with the relational arrangement that this interplay presupposes, I will now turn my attention to the psycho-temporal distortions that give homeless addiction its specific style.

In the context of *Itchy Park*, this style consists of a distinctive type of *trans-temporality*, embodied most profoundly by the radical anaesthesia of the blackout. As well as shunting the person into a temporal dimension that stands far beyond the “artificial” systems of normative time described by Bergson and Durkheim, blacking-out – understood henceforth as a bodily project unto itself – is also intimately connected with attempts to erase and/or reshape the boundaries of self. As has been made explicitly clear, understanding the manifold ways in which homeless addicts constitute or “sense” their selves is of paramount concern to this project. I will pay proper ethnographic attention to these ideas in due course. For now, let us consider the ways in which psychoactive substances transform a person’s sense of lived duration.

Regardless of how ceaselessly cadenced the ticking of a clock may appear, time itself rarely feels like it is flowing in a constant stream; rather it swells and shrinks from one activity to the next (Angrilli et al. 1997; Bergson 1950; Berrocal 2013; Gosden 1994; Fabian 1983, Flaherty 1999; Siffre 1965). Rarely is the threat of temporal caprice more viscerally felt than when under the influence of mind-altering

⁴⁶ In the case of Gregory Bateson’s (1958) analysis of *naven* in Papua New Guinea, for example, this style consists of a specific form of reciprocal transvestism.

chemicals (MacAndrew & Edgerton 1969; Hill 1978; Lapp et al. 1994; Heyes 2014). Drugs radically change time by affecting the speed of our internal clock and the levels of attention a person pays to time. Smart's (1968:83) alcoholics, for example, were said to possess 'different time orientation than is usual in non-alcoholics'; with a particular deficiency in "future time perspective." His patients were said to exist in a kind of "perpetual present" that lacks both *extension* – 'the length of the future time span which is conceptualised' – and *coherence* – 'the degree of organisation of the events in the future time span.' Even in states of total sobriety, it is highly unlikely that a person's perception of time's flow will match up precisely with that of the external clock. In the midst of a binge, the disconnection between the perception of time's passing and "clock measured" time will be even more drastically out of sync. Drugs are to human temporality what viruses are to human cells – they require a host body to activate their ontological and temporal potential.

In recalling the experiencing of nothingness that constituted the "knot" of homeless existence explored in the previous chapter, we can give ethnographic life to Lance Morrow's poignant observation that 'waiting casts one's life into a little dungeon of time' (1984:65). Max, Larry, Tony and their contemporaries understand this idea at the very core of their being. So, when drugs become involved, whilst the theme of incarceration and captivity is appealing (and culturally pervasive), it seems that something like a space-capsule might be more appropriate; in the sense that in both cases one cannot leave the confines of the box, but in the capsule there is the dynamic sense of moving through and beyond frontiers – of going beyond the world, where the new space itself transforms time. This idea, that the turning-inward of temporality can also operate as a transcendent force – an *élan vital* in Bergson's terms – is what Deleuze would call *creative involution*, a means of becoming-Other even in the face of entropy. This paradox, Gontarski reminds us, is also at the heart of of Beckett's most "entropic" works, *Waiting for Godot*, *Murphy* and *Endgame*. In all three plays, as on the streets, nothingness is a constant tyrant, one that must be at once escaped and transfigured, lest the world itself collapse into hopelessness of solipsism.

For Beckett then, there is always a kind of motion stitched into nothingness; a paradox he describes through the image of ‘a missile without provenance or target, caught up in a tumult of non-Newtonian motion’ (*Murphy* 112-13). The blacked-out body is a similar kind of missile, its launching made possible by the power of drugs to warp and transform a person’s sense of time. In light of these ideas, I invite the reader to consider this short extract from Thomas De Quincey’s (1949:314) *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*: ‘Sometimes I seemed to have lived for seventy or a hundred years in one night; nay, sometimes had feelings representative of a duration far beyond the limits of any human experience.’ Better yet consider the descriptions offered up by Aldous Huxley (2004:21) regarding his experience of mescaline: ‘And along with indifference to space there went an even more complete indifference to time. “There seems to be plenty of it,” was all I would answer, when the investigator asked me to say what I felt about time...but exactly how much was entirely irrelevant. I could, of course, have looked at my watch; but my watch, I knew, was in another universe. My actual experience of an indefinite duration or alternatively of a perpetual present made up one continually changing apocalypse.’ Having heard a few choice words from two of the most celebrated authors of the intoxicated genre, let us now hear a few from Pete, a homeless man who fills his days getting wasted in a small public park in Islington:

‘When you get to the park and start getting on it, you leave your problems at the door. Booze and drugs, especially H, they make the day so much easier. Sure, you pay for it later, but when you’re fucked up, time just kind of melts away. Drunk, sober. They’re just different ways of seeing the world.’

Whilst De Quincey, Huxley and Pete are as much from different worlds as they are times, their understandings of intoxicated temporality are clearly compatible with another. In each case, be it a Huxlean mescaline trip, a De Quincean excursion into an opiate dreamworld, or a Petrine binge session in Islington, the initiation of these states marks a temporary departure from normal temporal circumstances. The

liquefaction of time through drugs – what Pete calls “the melting away” – is a common image (both in literature and at street-level), one that the homeless addicts of this project often referred to when asked to describe the sensorial effects of drug-taking. As Bernie, one of Pete’s longest standing “drug associates,” puts it: *‘When you drink, it’s like a fire that you can feel spreading throughout your body. After a while time starts to slip away from you, like it no longer matters. Nothing matters. You’re just floating away. Gone. You’ve fucked the world right off.’*

Like the transformative effects of erotic ecstasy, drugs narrow and distort the stream of consciousness with such rapturous intensity that those who choose to exit everyday reality in favour of drug-fuelled realities become inherently less aware of the extremities of time-space, instead becoming myopically focused (Steele and Josephs 1990) on the temporal and spatial centres of inner life. Norman K. Denzin (1987) wrote at length about alcohol’s power to generate temporal simultaneity within subjective experience. Alcohol, perhaps more effectively than any other drug, alters a person’s temporal consciousness. According to Denzin, the drinker is always situated in a temporal world that is either accelerated or spread out over the present. In his eyes, alcohol flattens out the internal flow of time to create an extended “idealised”⁴⁷ present, thereby transforming the drinker’s conceptualisation of cause and effect.

Setting aside the pathologising undercurrents of his analysis of, Denzin’s phenomenological approach to the alcoholic self reinforces what Pete and Bernie have already been explicitly telling us, that the drug-user acutely recognises himself as a temporal being. In getting fucked up⁴⁸ (and by extension “fucking the world off”) the drug-taker is actively reworking the flow of time in his interior stream of

⁴⁷ In her classic study on alcohol, Mary Douglas (1987:11) alerted anthropologists to its capacity to subjectively construct ‘an intelligible, bearable world which is more how an *ideal world* should be than the painful chaos threatening all the time.’ Understanding what shape these “ideal worlds” take for a given person requires more than simply paying lip service to an intoxicant’s power over the chemical pathways in the human brain; it requires embedding their psychoactive effects within the contingent and fluid orbits of a person’s social and political situation.

⁴⁸ And thus being labelled as a “fuck-up.”

experience. Thus by intoxicating himself, he changes his relationship to himself, to time, and to the flow of time. Heidegger's assertion that human life does not happen in time but is time itself seems especially pertinent here. His ideas remind us that the drug-user does not encounter time as an external force, neither distorting it like a glassblower shapes the object of his fantasy, nor stepping into it like one does the flow of a river, nor as something that he cognitively/consciously processes from within, but rather his Dasein and temporality are one with each other. As time melts away, so the self melts with it. We could also say that as you get fucked up, so you fuck your self up. In other words, the temporality of intoxication enjoys a simultaneous and inextricable embodied unity with Dasein.

With these ideas in place, I will now dig deeper into the ontology of the drug-induced blackout. Drawing on and extending the scaffolding provided by de Martino, I will show that the dissolution of time through blacking-out – i.e. losing one's reproducible past – is much more than simply a depressive “symptom” of addiction, arguing instead that it be approached as an embodied act of self-transcendence that both short-circuits the futurity of the dominant chronopolitics whilst also serving to (partially) reconcile and transform the existential crisis brought about by haunting losses. Approached as a very specific form of “forgetting,” the blackout will help reveal the intricate way in which memory (or the removal therefore) shapes certain forms of life. In this way, by accounting for this state-of-being as a paradoxical type of “memory work,” this thesis will rearticulate the blackout as a kind of selective dissociation that subverts the tragedy of homeless abandonment – a tragedy that is simultaneously relational and temporal, intimate and structural.

The Temporality of the Blackout: An Exercise in Ethnographic Perversion

First studied in a clinical setting by Elvin Jellinek in 1946, the blackout was an integral part of his disease model of alcoholism, a theory that rapidly accelerated the medicalisation of drunkenness and by extension addiction in general. Despite

significant criticism (Fingarette 1988; Kumar et al. 2005; Leggio et al. 2009; Marlett and Gordon 1985; Peele 1984, 1998; Vaillant 1983; Vaillant and Milofsky 1982) for its narrow sample of hand-picked AA members and highly reductive conclusions with regards to the chronological phases of alcoholism, the legacy of Jellinek's symptomatic framework continues to reverberate through contemporary biomedical approaches to addiction, revealing itself in the modern ideologies of "phasing" and "control loss," whereby the addict stumbles "typically" from one increasingly dire stage to the next. Suffice to say that even in the face of ongoing criticism, the trajectories of his thought are far-reaching and stubbornly pervasive across the biomedical literature regarding the development of addictive conduct.

Furthermore, it is a common misconception that blacking-out is akin to the loss of consciousness. To confuse passing-out with blacking-out is to commit a grievous misunderstanding. Rather than losing consciousness, a person in the midst of a blackout is, biologically speaking, undergoing specific neurological impairments – brought about by extreme intoxication – that shut down the memory-storing faculties of the prefrontal lobe, the area of the brain located at the front of the cerebral cortex (Levin 1995; Rose and Grant 2010).. While much of the brain continues to function as normal – walking, talking, rolling cigarettes, throwing punches – the experiences that constitute the immediate past are not recorded into the reflexive reservoir that is human memory.

Critically, experiencing a blackout does not mean that a person is somehow unable to react to a developing situation that is affecting them. In other words, although they still possess a "flowing" sense of the present, the past essentially slips out of existence almost as quickly as it is produced, like water running through a sieve. What's more, there is also an important distinction to be drawn between the immediate past that lingers in the present's slipstream, and the past that is recalled through memory. William James' (1950) work on the "specious present"⁴⁹ offers a

⁴⁹ What he describes as 'the short duration of which we are immediately and incessantly sensible' (1950:631)

useful lens through which to think through this important distinction. From his perspective, the immediate past that streams behind the present like a comet's tail is markedly different from the remembered past of memory, insofar as memory "reproduces" an event that has already faded away:⁵⁰ 'the reproduction of the event, after it has completely dropped out of the rearward end of the specious present, is an entirely different psychic fact from its direct perception in the specious present as a thing immediately past' (*ibid*:631). Damasio affirms this idea, noting how 'whenever we recall a given object, or face, or scene, we do not get an exact reproduction but rather an interpretation, a newly constructed version of the original' (1994:100). Understood from this angle, the immediate past is that section of the specious present that is not yet committed to the reproductive machinery of memory. When memory recollects and marshals a present that is now past into a cohesive block, that "past present" will inherently include its own impression of what was for it the immediate past. This is why James believes that a being without memory could still have a sense of time, i.e. 'that temporality is a necessary but not sufficient condition of memory, and memory is a sufficient but not a necessary condition of temporality' (Hoy 2009:47).

So, if memory is a kind of embodied representation brought about by a particular set of neurological "firing patterns," then the blackout constitutes a serious short-circuiting of this interpretive system. In *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett concerns himself with precisely this kind of breakdown, framing time – and specifically memory – as the primary burden of consciousness. For Estragon, Vladimir and Pozzo, life is spent in anticipation of grander meaning and purpose. However, when this meaning continually fails to arrive, life is reduced to the emptiness of endless waiting, of killing enough time to get through the tyranny of the day. As I have already intimated, this set of existential and temporal anxieties is an inextricable part of life on the streets. For Beckett's protagonists as for the men and women of *Itchy Park*, daily life is centred around two key questions" "Do you remember what happened?"

⁵⁰ In the Derridean sense of things, memory is thus always already a kind of absence, a ghost of the past, so to speak.

and “What are we waiting for?” Thinking about these ideas in anthropological terms, I find myself posing my own set of questions: what happens when the supposedly synthetic link between past, present and future, anticipation and memory, begins to break apart? What does it mean to exist as a being *without* memory? What does a sense of time look like in the absence of memory? How do we even recognise it? If indeed such a being does exist, what does it tell us about the role of memory in the constitution of subjectivity, of temporality, or even politics? What, if any, are the advantages of this kind of self-inflicted forgetting?

A closer look into the lived experience of the blackout can take us some way to answering these questions. Indeed, taking into account the ideas shared across thinkers as diverse as James, Bergson, Beckett and Damasio, it is a central claim of mine that it would be highly wide of the mark to suggest that a blacked-out person does not possess a sense of time. Grounded in these ideas, I will argue that the blacked-out body embodies a specific temporality that operates as a radical break from “normative” temporal orientations. For heuristic purposes, I will henceforth group these normative orientations under the rubric of “late-liberal time.” In stark comparison with the temporality of the blackout, late-liberal time is predicated on a synthetic continuity (and directional movement) between the tenses; particularly between memory and anticipation. In other words, to be a good temporal citizen in late-liberal society you must use your memories as a currency with which to plan productively (read “invest”) for the future. As will hopefully become clear as the thesis progress, late-liberal time is constituted by its own set of ethics and disciplinary controls that are themselves founded on certain principles of Western historicism; namely the idea that yesterdays and tomorrows flow seamlessly and “progressively” into one another by way of linear continuity (Fasolt 2004; Ginzburg 1993; Hirsch and Stewart 2005; Palmié 2013; Stewart 2003).

In contrast to the pathologising approach offered by the Jellinek school-of-thought, this thesis takes the temporality of the blackout to be constitutive of a particular kind of selective dissociation – in which the presence of anOther Self slips into the

empty vacuum left by memory's absence. As I intend to demonstrate, by adopting a more nuanced approach towards the blackout, it becomes possible to conceptualise the addicted body not as pathological or singular body, but as a plural, non-solipsistic body in ceaseless transition between different forms of being.

The blackout, it should be noted, is by definition, a fiendishly difficult subject for ethnographic inquiry. In a situation that feels almost darkly comic, it is *de facto* impossible to ask a person to reflect on the "moment-to-moment" phenomenal aspects of the blackout. In James' terms, the person is incapable of reproducing their experience as a "psychic fact." Throughout the course of my fieldwork, time and time again I was in the company of people who were within a blackout, chatting with them, swapping stories, sharing drinks. The irony, of course, is that there was never any way of knowing in that moment if the person was in the throes of such a perverse and paradoxical experience. It was only the next day that their blackouts would reveal themselves as a personal and social reality. It should be noted, of course, that there is nothing stopping a person from reflecting meaningfully on the experience of absence itself. This, it turns out, offers perhaps the best means of escape from this rather perplexing methodological quagmire. Listening to homeless addicts reflect post-blackout, on their own terms, about the trance-like sensation of "losing time" and "becoming somebody else" allowed me to approach the phenomenon as a form of self-inflicted, ghost-like disengagement from the flow of normal time. As such, I was then able to embed their emic descriptions within the multi-layered complexity of their relational worlds and life histories, thereby legitimising the blackout as an object of ethnographic inquiry – one that can (and will) be meaningfully positioned within wider socio-political (and theoretical) matrices.

To flush out these ideas, I will now offer up a particular vignette, the purpose of which is to ethnographically demonstrate the temporal alterity of the blackout. Ultimately, the ideas embedded within this account will be used as a platform on which to think through an alternative vision of the addicted body, focusing on how

the radical temporality of intoxicants become simultaneously interlaced with ongoing relational tragedies to produce the dissociative effects of narcotic possession.

All the King's Men: Back to Blackout

Propelled into extreme binge-drinking following the breakdown of his marriage and consequent homelessness, a crisis that was brutally compounded soon after by the death of his entire remaining family in a car-crash, Ash has been dossing and drinking around Blackfriars for almost three decades. With his ice blue eyes, wild grey hair and thick Scottish accent, Ash often resembles the prototypical urban vagrant. Having lived on the streets for so long, he readily describes them as a home in and of themselves. His “true love,” so to speak, is booze:

‘I’m a binge drinker. When I drink I just don’t stop, don’t eat. Nothing, just drink. Some days I don’t need it at all. But the thing is most of the time when I’m sober I get very down, like I’m falling apart into pieces. Sometimes it gets so bad that it makes me want to kill myself. Alcohol makes me feel whole again. It puts me back together. I just keep going until everything about my life fades away.’

For Ash, it is only when binging on alcohol that his temporal tenses start to break up, whereby the haunting echoes of yesterday no longer colonise his tomorrow. In contrast to the punctuated linearity of normal sober time, in which Ash feels at risk of existential collapse, drunkenness causes time to drift out-of-joint, taking the sting out of his normative temporality, eventually casting him into the netherworld of the blackout. Ironically though, it is in these states of timeless self-abandonment, beyond the realm of Giddens’ (1991) “practical consciousness” and its corollaries of future anticipation, where Ash feels whole again.

De Martino’s theoretical framework provides anthropology with an avenue to explore this seemingly paradoxical state of affairs. Remember that, in his sober time,

homeless and destitute, he feels as if he is falling apart – what de Martino would recognise as the “crisis of presence.” Burdened with a tragic yesterday and an empty tomorrow, Ash finds himself washed up on the banks of late-liberal time, dislocated from the inter-subjective relations that bind him to the rest of society, and indeed history.⁵¹ Human consciousness or “presence,” de Martino tells us, is generated under the shadow of this void, in which ‘the risk of human history not existing takes shape as the risk of losing culture and receding without mitigation into nature’ (2012:5). As such, when a specific historical moment threatens to collapse in on itself, there arises a peculiar existential contradiction where the strength of “presence” to produce subjectivity becomes twisted back on itself – creating a situation where presence *is* crisis; what Ash describes as “falling to pieces”. Crisis thus represents the ultimate risk – annihilation of that which is human (a possibility that Ash reflexively acknowledges when he regularly contemplates suicide). In this sense, Ash’s sober presence – fragmented, on the verge of collapse – is facing a crisis point where the possibility of ceasing to be feels like a real prospect. In this sense, Ash is staring down the barrel of becoming absent from history. Symbiotically adjoined to this fragmentary, precarious and fading sense of presence is the ongoing existence of autobiographical memory, an embodied human capacity that sits between the stream of past experience and objective narrative, feeding into a reflexive, durative sense of self that, in Ash’s case, is constituted above all by the compound fractures of tragic loss. In other words, his crisis of presence is inseparable from the presence of his memory.

Consequently, it is not an exaggeration to say that, when sober, Ash feels at ‘risk of losing the very possibility of deploying the formal energy of being-there’ (2012:10). Teetering on the precipice of his own existence, he is forced to consider the prospect of his own alienation from history. To borrow a phrase from de Martino’s writings, Ash thus uses alcohol as a redemptive “system of techniques” to un-paralyse himself from the radical threat of homeless alienation through a transcendental step into the

⁵¹ An existential condition that was marked by the compound fracture of death and homelessness - a double-tragedy in which both his relationships and temporality simultaneously went up in smoke.

atemporal realm of the blackout – a space that sits beyond the normal flow of history and memory, where time is willed to go on behind his back. So, in “absencing” himself through the atomising effects of drunkenness, Ash is paradoxically able to partially recover a sense of presence, to regain some traction on a world that felt as if it was falling apart; to “feel whole again.”

In other words, by actively dispensing with the synthesising capacity of memory, Ash is effectively dehistorifying his presence, dropping himself out of history (absencing himself) to gain the necessary adhesion to reinsert himself back into the present. However, the dehistorified being that emerges into the blacked-out present, to fill the void left by his memory, is ultimately a different being altogether. Under these conditions, the present tense – no longer in symbiotic contact with the synthesising capacity of memory – turns in on itself, ossifying around the new presence to create a temporality in which the immediate past is no longer cognitively accessible. In these moments, the immediate past can no longer be reproduced into a psychic fact. Without these psychic facts there can be no such thing as a reflexively driven future. The blacked-out presence, constituted by a present tense that effectively locks out the reproducible past,⁵² can therefore be said to exist exclusively in periods of “lost time.” In this sense, alcohol has crafted for Ash at once a new body and a new temporality. To draw on his own Humpty Dumpty metaphor, faced with the shattered pieces of his sober being, alcohol rebuilds his being, not as it was before (“brick for brick”), instead reassembling the broken pieces into a radically different temporal and bodily form. The irony, of course, is that Ash, by virtue of his memory-loss, has no reflexive access to this alternative bodily form. Rather he recovers a sense of presence only by living as an absence. This is the key existential paradox at the heart of the blackout.

Indeed, the moment the booze wears off and Ash returns to sobriety his crisis-of-presence will invariably come roaring back, along with all the attendant memories

⁵² The reproducible past of memory distinct from the ever-fading past that constitutes the comet’s tail of James’ specious present. It is for this reason that when in a blackout a person can still have a “sense” of the past without being able to actually recall it.

that make it feel as if his existence is falling to pieces. In other words, the crisis is only solved so long as the person remains dehistorified. In the institutionalised ritual settings analysed in de Martino's ethnographies, the idea is that the fragmenting subject returns from the dehistorified state with a more solidified sense of presence. The problem, it seems, with the embodied, self-enacted form of dehistorification articulated here is that the person in question does not emerge on the other side any more solid than when they left. Rather the solidification or "recovery" of presence occurs from *within* the space of dehistorification, rather than *through* it.

Paradoxically then, the possibility of restoring presence becomes locked within a corporeal form that is constituted specifically by its capacity to live as an absence – what is experienced as a seemingly endless game of cat and mouse. For people like Ash who wake up every morning and immediately feel as if the fabric of their existence is unravelling at the seams, a voyage into the dehistorified space of the blackout is akin to a kind of Sisyphean torment, insofar as the "wholeness" he seeks is, in effect, always already just out of reach. To wit: *in trying to become whole he becomes hole*. What we have, in other words, is an oxymoronic state of being in which through alcoholically losing his memory he recovers presence – until the sauce wears off that is, at which point he *de facto* loses presence and recovers his memory.

As with Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, Ash's presence and his memory are existentially incapable of being in the same room at the same time. Forced to endure an existence in which his sense of presence continuously slips away just at the moment when it is recovered, it does not seem extreme to suggest that Ash's bouts of intoxicated dehistorification are simultaneously as destructive as they are redemptive. This then, is our first real glimpse into homeless addiction's much-maligned "vicious cycle" – a notoriously self-destructive social phenomenon that will be placed under significant analytical scrutiny over the coming chapters. Critically, I will not be approaching this phenomenon in terms of "the will" (or lack thereof), but rather in terms of the embodied short-circuiting made manifest in Ash's vignette, where transcendent bodily techniques are simultaneously escape routes and prisons.

Ash's regular bouts of black-out intoxication, I have thus far argued, can be seen as kind of DIY dehistoricification – a ritualisation of the body that partially guards against the slipping away of presence when confronted with the simultaneous break(ing)down of time and relationships. In this sense, de Martino's work has provided us with the theoretical scaffolding with which to explore the key structural patterns of the addictive-ritualisation process. However, the job is only half done. My re-articulation of de Martino's framework has thus far explained, through Ash's ethnographic vignette, the way in which blacked-out people step "out of time" and "out of body." Thus far, however, his dehistoricification model possesses something of an overly-functionalist edge – suggesting somehow that the ritual's efficacy lies in its "functional" capacity to rescue the sufferer from their crisis-of-presence. An action – in this case intoxicating oneself into a blackout – is not rendered ritualised solely by its functional elements. In de Martino's work, the existential salvage-operations conducted through rituals of dehistoricification rely on the constant interaction between meaning and function as mediated through the symbolic ordering of a specifically Italian Christian universe; what he termed *riscatto culturale* ("cultural redemption"). In other words, whilst De Martino shows us that being dehistoricified into the timeless space of metahistory can go some way to "saving" the subject from the crisis-of-presence, he holds back from exploring in any great detail the relational and temporal configurations that shape the person once they find themselves thrown into this timeless space.

In order to provide the fullest possible account of the blackout's inherent complexity (not to mention its potentiality), a simultaneous probing into its temporal form *and* relational structure is required. Accordingly, in the chapter that follows I will be exploring the blackout as the convergence between two distinct and yet always overlapping forms of absence – namely relational absences as contained and transformed via drug-surrogacy, and the temporal absence ("being-out-of-time/body") engendered by the dehistoricifying power of drug-fuelled anaesthesia. Intrinsic to these ideas is the notion that when intoxicated to excess, under certain

social and political conditions, a person really can become *somebody else*.

Consequently, the dissociative states entered into by people such as Ash will be shown to have infinitely more in common with the experience of spirit possession than they do with any kind of biomedical pathology. In this way, the blackout will be explored as a space in which a multiplicity of perspectives can coexist through a radical moment of temporal and corporeal hybridisation – a moment in which time, and self, are killed both at once.

Chapter Four: The Demonic Narcotic

Living with Demons

To recap: faced with the haunting presence of ghostly forces brought about by tragic relational and temporal breakdowns, homeless addicts, such as Ash, use drugs and alcohol to transform their relationship to this gaping sense of absence, finding paradoxical refuge in the temporal oblivion of the blackout, and in the process becoming an absence themselves. Introduced in the previous chapter as a kind of living effigy, the blacked-out body has hitherto been described as an uncanny being unto itself, a mimetic double of the very forces it seeks so desperately to escape. Over the course of this chapter, I intend to extend the analysis a step further, re-articulating these ghostly Others as agents of possession that gradually take hold of the addict through the radical temporality-relationality of the blackout.

In line with this intention, it is significant that these ghostly forces were continuously articulated to me by my informants in terms of pervasive demonic forces – those spirit-beings most readily associated with instances of possession. *Dealing with your demons, battling with your demons, fighting off your demons, living with your demons* – these were the expressions that arose time and time again when people spoke of the ongoing relational trauma of their tragic predicament. For the purposes of this thesis, I take the distinction between ghosts and demons in the context of *Itchy Park* to be somewhat illusory. Indeed, as Stewart (1991) notes in his study of the *exotiká* (demonic forces) in Greece, ghosts are very much part of the demonic pantheon, both within Christianity and beyond. In his ethnography he talks specifically of *phandásmata*. Akin to our word “phantasm,” these most ethereal of demonic forces are the ghosts of dead people that return to earth in various labile forms, often in dreams. Whilst I am in no way suggesting that the existential conditions of *Itchy Park* somehow mirror the local cosmology found within the Greek context of Naxos in the 1980s, Stewart’s work offers an important cross-cultural reminder that demons are intrinsically prone to take ghostly forms, their bodies always assuming a variety of shapes – shapes that are often invisible

to the naked eye. The point is that metamorphosis is seen by anthropologists to be a key feature of the demonic; a characteristic that was at once felt and *lived* on the park benches.

As such, these “demons” are not exactly of the fire and brimstone variety, such as those encountered after the last judgement in hell. In this regard they are not experienced as part of some divine or supernatural order. An exception to is the upcoming vignette concerning Perry, whose immersion into the spirit world of gods and demons is constituted by a cosmological scaffolding that was not shared by anybody else I met in the field. As will shortly become clear though, the tragic arc of Perry’s life trajectory is very much cut from a similar cloth to the rest of this thesis’ protagonists. So, although the shape and form of Perry’s demons will appear somewhat divergent from the rest of my informants, it remains a central claim of this chapter that his transcendent step into the spirit domain is still very much preconditioned by the three-way imbrication of intoxicants, structural alienation, and intimate losses.

Although rarely used by *Itchy Park*’s addicts in the religious sense, the use of the word “demon” in ordinary English language and culture undeniably follows a certain Christian tradition, particularly with regard to the “desires of the flesh.” Indeed, historically speaking the fleshly desires of the Christian body must be continually overcome, lest they drag the person into the realm of deadly sin (Greenfield 1988). As the example of the desert monks afflicted by the acedia demon (a precursor to the deadly sin of “sloth”⁵³) showed in chapter two, the world of demons effectively served as the idiom of Christian psychology and morality. This interrelation between (demonic) bodily vices and the redemptive pursuit of ascetic virtue is part of an ongoing legacy, one that continues to bear a special imprint on the understanding and treatment of addiction. Paul Antze (1987), for example, in his ethnography of *Alcoholics Anonymous*, notes how the concept of “disease” works as a ready-made replacement for the idea of Original Sin – a shift that necessarily casts off the traditional baggage of moralism without dispensing with the pre-determined “nature” of the alcoholic. As with the flesh

⁵³ For a deeper look at the historical relationship between Acedia and the deadly sins see Crislip (2005).

of the Christian body, the AA body is under continual threat from itself, thereby demanding a particular kind of asceticism, better known as *abstinence*. Achieved through “surrendering” to a Higher Power, abstinence can thus be understood as a form of spiritual transcendence from the demonic or sinful desires of the flesh.

For those dwelling in the park, whilst demon and desire were indivisibly entwined to one degree or another, the bodily, existential and moral dilemmas that ensued from this entanglement were rarely framed, if ever, in Christian terms. Instead, the demonic bodily “desires” pursued by the park’s residents were readily subsumed into the modern regime of biopower, their addiction an open and easy target for the twin disciplinary forces of medicalisation and judicial sanction. Consequently, the men and women of *Itchy Park* became the recipients of a paradoxical double-diagnosis, locking them in a perverse moral universe in which any attempts to transcend their demons only led society to demonise them further.

Below the poverty line, the biopolitical imperative to “self-regulate” one’s wellbeing has taken a decidedly self-destructive turn for the worse, experienced by the homeless as especially uneven to the point of being relentlessly abusive, a force of repression rather than protection. In this sense, the structurally imposed suffering brought about by these shifts in biopower has shaped the demons of *Itchy Park* in a particular way, interlacing them into the break(ing)down of each person’s most intimate material, temporal, and relational (and as we shall see cosmological) connections. Accordingly, the demons that form the focus of this chapter should not be understood as objective entities, but rather as ethereal and corporeal *forces* that have the potential to ensnare certain bodies within states of perpetual and partial metamorphosis. In analysing the demonic in this way, I aim to avoid the classic pitfall of social constructivism, that is to “take seriously” the discourse of addiction but not necessarily what this discourse concerns – namely the addiction itself. So, when people kept telling me that they were struggling to overcome their demons, I have treated these statements as existentially factual, rather than

discursively metaphorical⁵⁴. As such, the continuum of violence, tragedy, and abjection that shapes homeless existence is not to be understood as a simple case of urban decay at the margins of society; rather it is ontological within its own logic. This, I intend to show, is the double logic of mimesis and metamorphosis, made manifest in the way that people narcotically transcend their daily suffering by *becoming other selves*.

The Spirit of Invention

Drawing inspiration from the work of Roy Wagner, Martin Holbraad and Morten Pedersen I will approach the blacked-out body as a particular “reinvention of self.” Implicit within this idea is Wagner’s critique of culture as “an invention”: in presuming that the only way for people to possess culture is to arrange the world by way of certain convention(s), the anthropologist effectively “converts” his experience of the Other’s existence by deploying his own moeurs so that their world can be made to fit into a certain “conventional” order. According to Wagner and Holbraad, however, what the anthropologist really encounters in their fieldwork are not reified structures and symbols etc., but the endless and contingent rhythm of human beings getting through their day. Intrinsic to this view of human being is that its conditions may well not be directed by the establishment and acceptance of “fixed” conventions/cultural categories.

Speaking of the Daribi of Papua New Guinea, Wagner (1981) suggests that the parts of life that the Daribi consider most existentially meaningful (ritual, spirits, myth, etc.) are engaged not by “orderly” packaging them into bounded conventions. Arguing to the contrary, Wagner instead proposes that their daily rhythms and social conventions are preeminent, a “given” ontological threshold from which their relationships and interactions are continually and creatively negotiated and transformed. Human beings, in this sense, do not stand above and apart from the world (as in the transcendental Kantian subject, for example), bringing it to order through convention, but rather are inextricably swept up in the world’s fundamental capacity to transform itself by ceaselessly going

⁵⁴ Laing, like Jung before him, would have endorsed this approach, both insisting that the therapist must be guided by the realities of the patient. Likewise, from an anthropological perspective, their advice has much to recommend it.

beyond the limits of the conventional categories that the Daribi take as ontologically given.

For example, during the habu ritual in which Daribi men impersonate ghosts that are said to cause illnesses, they are not obeying the demands of cultural convention; rather they improvise with the ontological “givens” they have to hand, a process that capsizes “innate” distinctions (in this specific case the distinction between living bodies and dead ghosts) to produce an effect that is profound strictly because it rearticulates the categories that they take for granted. In these moments of category cross-over, in which the habu men impersonate the ghosts (i.e. “take on” their nature, as Holbraad might say), the dead are brought to life in their interactions with living people. This then, is the power of the habu – to turn convention inside-out and thereby produce or “invent” a novel social reality, one in which ghosts and men can occupy the same body.

Evoking the improvisational spirit of the jazz musician, Holbraad and Pedersen (2017) convincingly argue in their reflections on Wagner’s work that the ethnography of Daribi “invention” must expedite a process of invention on the part of the anthropologist: ‘Departing from the conventional anthropological notion of culture as convention, the anthropologist is called upon to transform the notion in a way that incorporates the possibility of invention as described for the Daribi – in other words, to invent the notion of “culture” as invention’ (*ibid*:83).

Now, it should be noted that within anthropology, the idea that spirit possession possesses a creative dimension is nothing new. That being said, if we follow Holbraad’s (2012) argument concerning the limits of anthropological knowledge, simply explaining (or interpreting) a social phenomenon as “creative” rings fundamentally hollow unless we develop for ourselves the conceptual tools with which to think through the particular “shape” of this creativity. This is what Holbraad meant when, in his inaugural lecture, he spoke of anthropology as being in the business of enacting morphological shifts. For him, the ethnographic space gives social existence a particular shape, turning life into concepts, so to speak. From this perspective, finding alternative means of

conceptualising social life is a sui generis project in itself, and one that is at the core of all meaningful anthropological description. With regards to my own project, it is my position that the biomedical model has been painting homeless-addiction's portrait with entirely the wrong conceptual brushes. As such, by thinking about the blackout in terms of spiritual and bodily possession – rather than spiritual and bodily destruction – I feel that its conceptual “shape” can be refigured in such a way that forces us to reconsider our most taken-for-granted assumptions about addiction itself, both as state-of-being and an intellectual concept. So, honouring Holbraad's position, I will henceforth look, using the possession framework, to conceptually remodel homeless addiction from beyond biomedicine's narrow purview, conceiving it instead as a particular “reinvention” of self (the creative potential of which will be evaluated in accordance with the social, political, material and bodily context in which it is always already embedded).

The Triangle of Intoxicated Invention

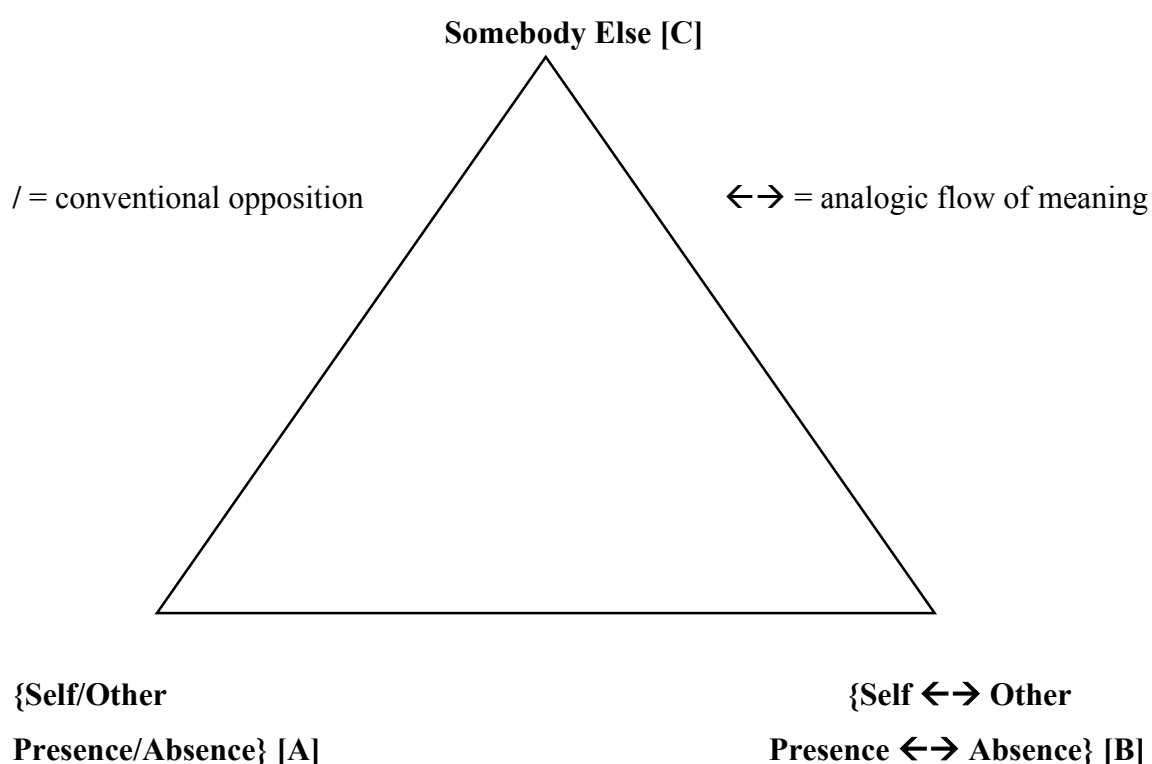


Fig 2. *Triangle of Intoxicated Invention*

To illuminate the way in which “becoming somebody else” through blacking-out disrupts the normal *conventional distinctions* of self/Other and presence/absence, I have employed a key device of Roy Wagner’s – “the triangle of invention.” The triangle works through what is known as *obviation*: ‘it requires that already established meanings are revealed (‘made obvious’) as being unnecessary, overcome, old hat, “obviated”’ (Holbraad and Pedersen 2017:91). For the purposes of clarity, Strathern’s definition of “obviational analysis” is also worth quoting directly: ‘Obviational “analysis” replicates for the observer the temporal and spatial sequences by which persons move themselves from one position to another through their constant perception and re-perception of relations. What at the end is made “obvious” is the relational basis of their perception’ (1991:79).

Ultimately, I will be using this obviational triangle as a conceptual basis for thinking through the blackout as a kind of trance/possession, in which the reverberating echoes of tragic loss come to “reinvent” the self in a way that is profoundly demonic in its constitution. In this way, I will demonstrate how the blackout can be understood as a dynamic, self-eclipsing form of invention, the exigencies of which are shaped by the stark conditions of homeless living.

I conceive “becoming somebody else” to be inventive in the Wagnerian sense insofar as it takes certain conventional assumptions for granted: namely that we are a collection of bound, cohesive, individual and singular selves, who are propelled forwards along the linear track of Western historicism, i.e. from the past into the present and through into the future (furthermore it is this individual “one-way” trip that constitutes the self as a particular kind of historical and ideological presence – existentially distinct from an intoxicated absence) and, by turning these assumptions inside-out through drugs, transforms the meaning of the terms involved. Contained within the simple declarative statement “I become somebody else,” then, is a metamorphosis of meaning that is constitutive of the knotted flow of homeless-addicted existence.

To substantiate this point, we may start with what can be called the ontological “default setting” [A] – one body, one self, one presence. This is the conventional base-line, against which the statement “I become somebody else” [C] acquires its meaning. Before this, however, we see the second step [B], in which conventional classifications {Self/Other Presence/Absence}⁵⁵ are distorted in order to be rearticulated in a new, “differentiating” way. The notion of becoming Other – possessed by the phantasmic form of a “somebody else” – is carried across onto the notion of what (my)self might be, metamorphosing itself across the conventional divide between Self and Other (in what Wagner would call the “analogic flow” of meaning).

So, whilst it is the default or “conventional” distinctions between self and Other, presence and absence [A], that provides the building blocks for the (re)invention, it is the second step [B] that energises the process, not only by offering a “reason” for the distortion (viz. an alternative means of being in a world that), but also because it sets the (re)invention in motion; effectively kick-starting the analogic flow through which the meaning of “Self” and Other” and “presence and absence” enter into relationship of “mutual reconstitution.” The effect of this movement, then, enacts the third step of the invention [C], ‘in which this movement of meaning is arrested so as to yield a new set of semiotic coordinates’ (Holbraad and Pedersen 2017:88). The possibility that, while existing in the present, the Self (“presence”) may also become simultaneously lost and Other (“absent”) is made manifest through the eversion of the default setting, such that the conventional distinction between Self and Other (and indeed presence/absence) is replaced by the proposition “I become somebody else” – a proposition (and modality-of-being) that differentiates the blacked-out body from the sober self.

In this sense, if “becoming somebody else” is an invention, then “sobering up” is, in Wagner’s terms, very much a “counter-invention,” insofar as the very act of blacked-out

⁵⁵ These two conventional assumptions that sustain the inventive transformation into the blacked-out body are mutually constitutive of each other. In mathematical terms they represent a conventional “set.” In this way, even though they each distinction can be seen as a “discrete object,” as a collection of terms the “set” can be seen as an object in its own right – namely a single set of size two: {Self/Other Presence/Absence}

invention involves, by virtue of its very creation, a retrospective re-invention of the initial meanings upon which it re-configures {Self/Other Presence/Absence} rendering them as ‘the “obvious” grounds that need to be overcome as and when new meanings are, in turn, refigured upon them’ (*ibid*:90). In other words, in the moment where the addict establishes his blacked-out body as “somebody else,” he is by that very fact reminding us that under normal “sober” conditions he is still himself.⁵⁶

It is worth recalling that the transition from (A) through to (C) and back to (A) again is constituted by a temporal disjuncture, i.e. a past, and thus by extension an Other (Self) that cannot be reflexively accessed. And yet, as we have seen, just because this Other (Self) does not exist within the reproductive realm of memory, this does not mean that this present-absence forfeits its ontological existence. Rather, as I described in the previous chapter, it emerges, through drug-surrogacy, as a kind of mimetic double, an alternative body-being that entombs the embattled sober self within an opaque flesh that is above all constituted by compound absences – the absence of Others, of memory, and of a meaningful place in socio-political structure.

Having established conceptually how blacked-out bodies effectively become other selves, I will now return to London’s streets, ethnographically exploring the way in which this kind of intoxicated (re)invention is intrinsically bound up with the tragic

⁵⁶ Again, PAC-MAN offers another means of thinking through this kind of obviational analysis. If Zoja and Napier are right, that modern life is constituted by an ever-growing scarcity of institutionalised ritual processes (i.e. warp portals), then how does PAC-MAN get to the metahistorical “off-maze” state? In a world where institutionalised warp-portals (along with the culturally ordained engineers that maintain them) are in ever shorter supply, the answer to this question – better yet *the only alternative* – lies latently within the contours of the in-game, in the flashing dots better known as *power-pellets*. Markedly different from the normal pellets that line the maze’s corridors, these “magical” power-pellets, by affecting a particular kind of bodily transformation, endow PAC-MAN with the temporary ability to eat the ghosts. I therefore submit that, in seeing PAC-MAN consume this magical substance, we bear witness to a figure/ground reversal in which the relationship between PAC-MAN and his ghosts is turned-inside out or, more accurately, *obviated*. Indeed, the moment following his ingestion of the power-pellet, the conventional PAC-MAN/ghost roles cross into each other, causing his would-be-assailants to turn a deep blue, signalling that really it is *he* who is now the ghost, and they him. In this moment we are not dealing with PAC-MAN and ghosts, but rather GHOST-MAN and Pac-ghosts. Eventually of course, the pellet’s magical potency begins to wear off, and the transformation turns back on – *obviates* – itself, made manifest in the reforming of the ghosts’ bodies in the central square in conjunction with the return of the conventional “ghost-fleeing” PAC-MAN. Although speaking of the Daribi of Papua New Guinea, Roy Wagner could well have been talking about PAC-MAN when he remarked that ‘ghosts “live” through the persons they possess, and their victims, in the same measure, “die” through them’ (1986:69).

demons of late-liberalism, and in particular how these demonic forces can be said to “possess” certain marginalised bodies. In this sense, we might say that the intoxicated bodies of *Itchy Park* really are under the influence. The question, then, is: *of what?*

Perry: The Demonic Anthropologist

In many ways, Perry’s descent into destitution is typical of many men who find themselves shelved under the “intentionally homeless” section of the State’s ever-growing filing-cabinet. Raised in foster care, and subject to ongoing sexual abuse throughout his teenage years, Perry’s life has been characterised by a continual stream of traumatic relational break(ing)downs. Barring a spell in prison for an assault that he claims was a case of mistaken identity, Perry has lived alone on the streets ever since leaving his foster home. His addiction in conjunction with his stint behind bars also saw him lose any kind of visitation rights for his two children, a loss that lingers with him on a daily basis: *‘Not being a father to my kids, it’s gut wrenching.’* Always either hungover or intoxicated, Perry runs the Manna Centre’s gauntlet every day with his behaviour, regularly the subject of extended bans due to his loud and intoxicated demeanour. Catch Perry in a lucid moment, and he will tell you that his life often feels like an interminable struggle: *‘I’m constantly sleep deprived, it’s like a form of torture. It’s like racing through hurdles that keep getting bigger...I just keep getting pushed around.’* Not so typical, however, is Perry’s personal articulation of the existential and spiritual conditions of his homeless lifeworld:

‘You look at me and all you see is just another homeless bloke, another junkie. You people, your politicians, your lawyers, they don’t see the big picture. My homelessness allows me to see the big picture. The things I’ve gone through growing up, the things I’ve lost. You need to suffer, we all do. That’s why my body is still here. I’m here only temporarily, to seek out what’s going on, to understand people, to understand races, cultures, only then can I ascend. I’m ascendent. I’m homeless for a reason, so that I can figure people out, open my eyes.’

According to Perry, the world is populated by malevolent spirits called “Draconians”⁵⁷ that secretly control, manipulate and effectively enslave the earth’s population. Invisible to everyone but the “uninitiated,” it is only by developing one’s “third eye” that one can see through the deception and render visible these dark spirits. As Perry tells me:

‘The “third eye” is really the “first eye.” The other two opticals are actually cursed with a constant blindness and deceive you. Truth can only come through the third eye.’

Crucially, these dark spirits enjoy a labile form that allows them to embed themselves within the hidden recesses of the material world, lurking in anything from human bodies to objects. In this sense, everyday life, both as form-of-being and an arrangement of objects, structures and people is constituted by pervasive Draconian interference. Furthermore, it is their all-pervasiveness that constitute the everyday social tragedies intrinsic to late-modernity, including homelessness. Indeed, modern capitalism, Perry claims, owes its success to the instalment of “Draconian power structures,” the result of which is world-wide spiritual impoverishment:

‘These people, just ’cos they’ve got a job and wear a suit, they think they’re somehow better than you. That’s no fucking spiritual wisdom. They’re fucking deluded, they’ve got no idea what’s going on. The world they think they know is actually the wool pulled over their eyes. Only through self-exploration and spiritual consciousness can we reveal the Truth. You’ve got to help yourself. Life is a cycle of continuous rebirth until you become an ascended master.’

⁵⁷ Although Perry claimed to have developed this terminology through his own personal voyage of ‘metaphysical investigation,’ the “Draconian” seems to enjoy a common usage among a limited selection of highly marginal conspiracy cults who see the modern world as part of a wider cosmic battleground between competing alien and spiritual sects (no dissimilar to the cosmogenic myths of the more mainstream Church of Scientology). Whether or not Perry was in fact directly influenced at some point in his life by these peripheral storytellers (as seems to be the case) is not really relevant to this discussion. What matters to this thesis is the recognition of such a perspective as a bona fide political cosmology that, at least in Perry’s case, has scaffolded the day-to-day realities of his being-in-the-world. In this sense, I will be treating the representational “Truth” of Draconian existence as secondary to the motile truth of Perry’s ontological attunement - that is to say the transformative collisions between his tragic life path as a homeless drug addict and the mythic beyond of transcendental/demonic spirits.

As far as Perry is concerned, the material conditions of his homelessness – including the break(ing)down of his most intimate relationships – are bound up with the alienating mechanics of late-liberal capitalism, a process that he conceives to be as much demonic as economic. This simultaneous entanglement between malevolent spirits and the ethics of capitalist production are thus constitutive of what he considers to be the grand deception of human existence in the modern age.

According to Perry, in order to truly “ascend” these oppressive conditions, one must reconceptualise the structure of the universe itself. The “real universe” he claims, can be understood in terms of concentrically larger dimensions that expand outwards, like Russian dolls; the materiality of the world gradually breaking down as one passes through and beyond each dimension. The first, second and third dolls/planes of existence are constituted by the material world of the here-and-now; walls, concrete objects, physical bodies, and language. Beyond these first three planes, the materiality of the cosmos starts to break down into what Perry calls “anti-matter.” In these dimensions, communication is no longer mediated through language but rather through a kind of disembodied telepathy, a channel of communication that is equally prone to Draconian interference and Higher Beings alike.

Entering these dimensions requires a bodily technique called astral projection, a skill that Perry claims to have learnt over a twenty-six-year period of *‘metaphysical investigation.’* He outlines the process of astral projection in terms of a three-step *‘transition of consciousness’*: The first transition is constituted by immediate bodily reflections in the here-and-now – *‘closing your eyes, ignoring the outside world.’* We can liken this stage to a kind of meditation, with its intense focus on the present. At this stage, Perry tells me, it is normal to have had a few drinks (among other things):

‘The alcohol and whatever else, I’m thankful for it, it gives me respite, helps me to push through. Imagine you’re in a dark room, then the light goes on, you’ve got to turn away and close your eyes, give yourself time to adjust.’

It is seemingly intoxication that mediates Perry's movement into the second (sub)transitional phase – what he describes mostly as “blank space.” According to Perry, whilst within this transitional space one is highly vulnerable to Draconian interference, so much so that it is common for people to find themselves stuck; neither in their material bodies, nor truly “ascended.” Getting stuck in the blank space is thus tantamount to a kind of spiritual anaesthesia, a liminality that often remains blocked on either side. In bodily terms, Perry describes the blank space as a kind of trance, or else a deep, “spiritually active sleep.” The ultimate aim, according to Perry, is for the *‘spirit to totally escape the body, leave your material self behind, and break out of the blank space and access other planes of existence. That’s how you overcome Draconian power.’*

On the other side of the blank space is the promised land of the “playtime” dimension – a space-time bathed in celestial, even blinding light,⁵⁸ in which the material world no longer binds the self to a fixed position or state, a place where the normal rules of reality no longer readily apply:

‘When I’m in that zone I’m able to walk through walls. This world right here is only a set of material constructions. It occurs in the sleeping state because in the waking world, the immediate space is too overwhelming – it’s hard to see through it all.’

Potentially full of other enlightened spirits also seeking “ascendent” projection, the playtime dimension – by virtue of its protean composition – is also vulnerable to Draconian interference, intrusions that often prevent full astral projection. So, not only do these powerful spirits embed themselves in the everyday structures of the material world, their labile, transcendental form means that they can simultaneously straddle different dimensions at any one time. Consequently, in order to “truly” ascend one must push through the threat of these Draconian intrusions and acquire what Perry calls a

⁵⁸ So powerful are the ascended dimensions in their synaesthetic overload that the “blinding light” of their sublime truth needs to be at least partially mediated by the “darkening” effects of drugs and alcohol – tinted lenses to guard the eyes from the glare of undiluted Truth, so to speak.

“three-hundred-and-sixty-degree perspective.” Through the painstaking study of these metaphysical techniques, Perry claims he has on a few occasions succeeded at pushing through the “blank space” and “ascending” into the anti-matter of the playtime dimension.

However, in these relatively rare “playtime moments” where he has felt his spirit escaping, Perry invariably feels *‘unseen hands pushing back into my body when I’ve been ascending.’* In his eyes, having his spirit forced back into his body in this manner is part of a wider cosmic imperative, evidence that his “mission” here on earth is no longer completed, that there is still unfinished business down here amongst the living. As he tells me one afternoon, not long after finishing off his second litre of cider:

‘I’m a higher being. You look at me and think he’s just a dirty, homeless drunk. That’s just my cover, my way of existing down here, so I can ascend.’

In this sense, Perry has come to see his material disenfranchisement as a kind of spiritual liberation – his golden ticket into what he calls “the big picture.” Being a homeless junkie is thus a necessary disguise (his “cover”) – a means of navigating the overwhelming opacity of the Draconian everyday. In this way, Perry makes explicit the intersection between demonic forces and the structural violence and intimate pain of homelessness. In this sense, I would invite us to think of the alienating power structures of late-liberal capitalism and the forces of Draconian manipulation as indistinguishable aspects of Perry’s being-in-the-world.

Significantly, the less intoxicated Perry is, the more modest he remains about his “ascendant” powers. Under conditions of relative sobriety, he emphasises his role as a student, as an observer of the world, initiated into the spiritual wisdom of the ascended masters, but not quite yet there himself. However, as his narcotic momentum starts to gather pace, his modesty becomes rapidly gives way to an excessive hubris that is

coloured by an acute disdain toward my presence in particular. The following excerpt⁵⁹ comes directly after he had been expelled from the Manna for drinking inside the premises, when, after one of our long metaphysical discussions, I made the dangerous mistake of passingly referring to his cosmology as a “belief system”:

‘It’s not a belief system, it’s a knowledge system. I’m fucking sick of you coming round here, poncing information of everybody⁶⁰. All you do is fucking talk. I know your state of mind better than you. I’ve ascended. You’re just a fucking loser like the rest of us. I feel sorry for you, you’re just doing the kind of research you think you want to do, but that’s not real wisdom, that’s not truth. Clearly you don’t have a desire to connect to the wisdom of ascended beings. You’re so fucking lost. That’s what the system does to you, drags you down by the balls, blinds you. You’re fucked up in the head. You don’t care, you don’t give a fuck. I know this all about you. You haven’t been listening to anything I’ve been trying to teach you, have you? You think because you’re at university that you’re some kind of expert? That’s just another kind of Draconian deception. You only know what you’ve been told. You’re a lost cause. I’m the true authority of real being. We’re all gods. We’re all Kings and Queens - we will keep reincarnating until we achieve mastery. You’re all mental patients to me and I’m a doctor! That’s my job, to wake everyone up.’

Significantly, although Perry uses drugs and alcohol to “wake himself up,” he does not feel that intoxication is in and of itself ecstatic; any such belief would be “classic Draconian manipulation.” True ecstasy, he tells me, comes from ascension – a process that *can* be catalysed through the mediating power of psychoactive substances, described by Perry as a ‘*sometimes necessary shortcut*’ (what in Hinduism is called the left-handed path). After concluding his lecture about my personal and spiritual

⁵⁹ It was at this point that I realised that Perry had started to see me as just another cog in the Draconian-driven illusion, a failed and corrupt “student” who was seemingly unable or unwilling to connect with the complexities of his cosmo-ontological situation.

⁶⁰ I felt at this point that Perry had inadvertently sunk his teeth into the one of the great insecurities of the contemporary anthropologist – that not only do we continuously betray our informants through misrepresentation, but that we also steal from them as well. “Grand Theft Anthropology,” so to speak. Napier (2004) describes this theft in different terms, comparing fieldwork with Munchausen’s-by-proxy.

inadequacies, Perry staggers off down the road, palms facing upward, chin raised to the sky, blissfully offering his praise to the heavens: *'thank you for creating my life, it is ecstatic.'* For Perry, ascending out of the "Draconian" material world and into the celestial dimensions of the divine requires continuous sacrifice at the everyday level: *'Letting go of my kids, it tears me apart, but without leaving them behind I can't complete my personal journey. You have to sacrifice anything and everything if you want to get closer to God, even your life. Like when I almost OD'd on heroin the other month. I don't regret it, I need it, in the pursuit of Truth'* – a "Truth" that presents itself as acquirable only through the socio-political destitution of his own material world.

In this sense, we can perhaps conceptualise Perry's body as on a cosmologically ordained motile trajectory, a path of becoming that is constituted as much by social and material loss as it is by the promise of divine ascension. Tellingly, this path of self-differentiating transformation is soaked in booze and drugs, so much so that (despite fleeting moments of "playtime" ascension) Perry invariably finds himself locked in the sub-transitional liminality of the "blank" space; a space neither of the body or the soul, constituted by continual demonic interference – lost in transition, so to speak. In these intoxicated moments, where dangerous spiritual forms (at once latent and labile) imbricate with the tragic trajectories of his homelessness, the resultant form is one of anaesthetic blankness.

Drawing Blanks

Interacting with the spirit world, what Perry refers to as "the transitioning of consciousness," requires a person to go beyond the boundary of their own body. Significantly, Perry exclusively uses drugs and alcohol to catalyse this transition. This passage from the material into the spiritual is fraught with danger, not least of all from the omnipresent threat of Draconian/demonic interference. In this sense, Perry's use of drugs as "transitional mediator" displays a certain ambivalence with regards to his ultimate goal of becoming an "ascended master." On the one hand, it is alcohol and drugs that supposedly facilitate the all-important thrust of his interdimensional travel,

pushing him into and through the blank space. The reality though, is that Perry is much more likely to *break down* than break through, his daily attempts at ascension almost always curtailed by Draconian intrusion, these malevolent forces locking him in a betwixt space-time that is blocked from both ends; trapping him within their demonic grasp, as it were. On top of that, on those rare occasions that he has “broken *through to the other side*,” the Truth turns out to be too much to handle, so much so that he requires narcotics to “dim the lights,” so to speak. In this sense, Perry’s substance use operates simultaneously as the accelerant and the handbrake of his spiritual transcendence, creating a kind of existential wheel spin that leaves him neither in one place nor the other.

Continually caught in this betwixt-between state – in which the self is neither materially grounded in the body nor spiritually transcendent – Perry never quite achieves the bodily dissolution he so urgently seeks. For even in those rare moments where he has broken through into the playtime dimension, the ecstasy remains short-lived as unseen hands invariably push him back into his material-bodily form. Perry explains this as one part of a wider cosmological logic of which he is the ultimate centre, wherein it is, ironically, only through his continued existence in the socio-economic gutter of homelessness that he will be able to accrue enough spiritual wisdom with which to finally shed the bondage of his bodily form and permanently join the Higher Beings of the sixth and final dimension. The everyday reality, however, is that more often than not Perry finds himself stuck in the blank space of his own excessive intoxication, a blocked liminality that corresponds, I posit, to the temporality of the blacked-out body. Indeed, as Perry himself describes, this blankness is constituted by a kind of anaesthetic absence, a trance-like sleep that is above all a kind of ‘*lost time*.’ In a perverse sense, what Perry takes to be an intrinsic part of his spiritual learning – his quest for transcendental completion via everyday suffering – is precisely what renders his journey as ultimately *interminable*.

At this point, let us also recall that “getting stuck” in this existential vacuum/deep trance is inevitably deemed to be the consequence of Draconian interference. The blank space

then, is ultimately where demons start to reveal themselves in their more concrete, agentive form, effectively unconcealed from the otherwise invisible form they take when lodged in the material conditions of everyday life. In a very real way, Perry's demons have come home to roost. Paradoxically, then, it is through his relentless desire to break free – *to ascend* – that Perry finds himself ensnared in the clutches of Draconian/demonic interference on an almost daily basis. Indeed, despite his best intentions to disburden himself from his material form and take his place among the celestial pantheon of ascended masters, the fact of the matter is that virtually all of Perry's time is spent somehow entangled with these malevolent spirits; either witnessing their manipulation at the material/street level through his *third eye*, or else rubbing elbows with them in the blank/blocked space of intoxicated liminality.

To tweak Levinas (2003:53), whilst Perry's need for escape may indeed constitute a 'quest for the marvellous,' this same quest is inevitably bound to break up on the jagged rocks of his own marginal existence. In this sense, it really is a complicated case not only of "getting out" but also of "going somewhere" – an everyday existential tension that Perry, like so many of the addicts that make up this thesis, continuously struggles to reconcile.

Incarcerated within a prison that is simultaneously his only escape route, Perry is never really able to "get out" from the demonic-economic entanglement that sustains his lived version of late-liberal capitalism, rendering him continually destitute at the material level whilst also foreclosing, for now at least, the possibility of "true" spiritual emancipation. The vicious circularity of Perry's situation shows the ways in which demonic forces emerge from the relational break(ing)down of a person's social lifeworld, becoming so pervasive that they can seemingly haunt every fissure of everyday (and spiritual) existence. Furthermore, Perry's case shows that whilst drugs are indeed utilised as part of *an attempt* to transcend the tragic circumstances of homelessness, the ecstasy on the "other side" turns out to be at best a false promise. If anything, blacking-out – getting stuck in "blank space" – produces a particular kind of body, one that is effectively *over-determined* by the malevolent interference of demonic

beings; *possessed*, in other words. In Perry's case, using drugs and alcohol as a short-cut for transcending his material situation – to overcome his demons – has inadvertently trapped him in a world infinitely more demonic than he could have possibly bargained for. We could thus legitimately say that through drink and drugs, Perry really does bring his demons to life; or rather enables them to take on a new *form of life*.

Whilst it would be fair to say that over the course of my fieldwork, out of my interlocutors it was Perry who spoke most explicitly of the connection between the intimate/structural violence of homelessness and demonic forces – that is to say he actually articulated it as a novel cosmo-ontological structure – I am suggesting that each and every person I got to know was, in their own unique and specific way, using drugs and alcohol to mediate and escape the pain of relational and temporal breakdown, a pain that was felt above all as simultaneously ghostly and demonic. In Perry's case, the demonic forces that come to possess him are fundamentally extrinsic, continually locking him within a blank space-time; a space-time that sits somewhere between the world of men and the world of gods. These forces are multiple and slippery, finding refuge not just within the material recesses of the everyday but also within his flesh, thus rendering his body as a battleground for cosmological transformation. Notwithstanding the intimate and structural violence he has continually suffered throughout his life, Perry ultimately frames his quest to escape the material conditions of his as very much driven from within, as a kind of deeply solitary journey. Housing, friends, family, children – this is all baggage that, no matter how painful, must be cast off if he is to ever reach true ascension.

By way of a complementary contrast, I will now introduce Jay, another homeless addict who, like Perry, continually finds himself locked in blank space-times. In contrast to Perry though, Jay's demons are not other-worldly in the Draconian sense of things, but rather they invade his being through the fissures of his most intimate tragedies, taking over his body via the blindspot of the blackout, perpetrating violence not only against himself, but also against those he loves.

Jay: The Last Traveller

'When I start to go, it's like things are in a dream. For a while I sort of know what's going on, like when I was getting these nine stitches [points to his enormously swollen lower lip], but when I think about it the next day it's like I'm lookin' down on myself, like I'm not really there. When people fill in the blanks for me, when I find out what I've done, I tell people: it's the alcohol, it's not me, it's somebody else.'

Jay grew up as part of a Scottish travelling community, eventually moving to London when he met his now ex-wife. Jay found himself made homeless after losing his job in conjunction with the breakdown of his twenty-five-year marriage – experienced as a kind of traumatic social death. Since finding himself cast out into society's badlands, it is not uncommon for Jay to put away 15-20 cans of super-strength cider in a single day. For many people, this level of alcohol consumption would be more than enough to put them in a coma, or worse. The longer he has been on the outside, the harder Jay has found it to try and establish any form of re-connection with his children. Speaking of his divorce and ostracism from the family home:

'That really tore me to fuckin' pieces. To be honest, my life is falling apart. I need the drink to make me feel better, it takes me away when I get out of my head, stops me being so angry. Helps me through the situation I'm in. I'm not angry with any particular person, I'm angry with the world. The system has fucked me up.'

Furthermore, although he is able to relate his alcoholism to his own systemic alienation, Jay is also quick to turn the moral trident on himself, continuously telling me how *'alcoholics don't deserve family.'* At certain points, Jay will stumble around, repeating over and over that he is *'the last of his kind.'* After Jay has been drinking for a while, he will often stop mid-sentence and suddenly start tearing his can apart with his teeth. As the remnants of his cider intermingle with the blood streaming from his mouth, his bestial rage makes way for series of cataleptic affirmations, that he is the *'last traveller,'* and that his alcoholism *'is my weakness, not in my body, but in my heart.'* In these

moments, it felt like being witness to a kind of perverse magical ceremony, in which Jay's prose had collapsed into sorcerous incantations.

In line with his heavy consumption, Jay has been blacking out with increasing frequency. In one of his more recent blackouts, Jay turned up at his family home in an attempt to see his youngest son. Seeing her ex-husband in such a wildly intoxicated and allegedly aggressive state, Jay's former wife has not only cut off all contact, she will no longer allow him to see his son, not until he has got himself "sorted out." Jay only discovered this incident had taken place a week later when he'd gotten in contact with his sister:

'I had no idea I'd been round there. Not a fucking clue. It was like she was telling me a story about somebody else – somebody I didn't understand at all. Apparently I went to her house afterwards. Stormed in there, called her a fat cunt, scared my son, caused all kinds of mess. No memory of it at all. It's hard being an alcoholic. I'm not scared of death, the only thing I'm scared of is not seeing my son again. I cry about it, every day. I'm basically already a dead man.'

Dislocated from his most intimate network, his ex-wife's assertion that Jay "sort himself out" is, paradoxically, both destined for failure and also likely to become a self-fulfilling prophecy. After all, by denying him access to his most important relationship, his son, Jay is forced to confront a relational vacuum which *needs* to be filled, one way or the other. In a very real sense, his ex-wife's conditions of exile are actually pushing him deeper into his relationship with alcohol. It is not an accident that when Jay wakes up in the morning he says that he '*needs a can to sort myself out*.'⁶¹ In a perverse sense, he is making good on his ex-wife's ultimatum, utilising alcohol as a relational surrogate to "sort himself" out of the relational black-hole imposed upon him by his situation.

⁶¹ The expression: "*to sort oneself out*" is used to describe the need to alleviate the pressures of one's situation. In this sense, "sorting oneself out" can articulate the need to reduce one's drinking and try and find a way out of homelessness, whilst also meaning the need to get hold of alcohol/drugs to get oneself through the day.



Fig. 3. *Booth House*

Jay profoundly captures the complexity of his situation through his own form of what Jean Dubuffet coined *art brut*; art, in other words, that is created outside the boundaries of official culture. On the day that I first encountered this particular painting, Jay is pacing erratically around the benches, claiming that someone has “grassed” him up to the police, convinced that they could be coming at any moment, at once to arrest him and confiscate his artwork:

'They've got a warrant out for my arrest, for a run-in I had with the security guards at the hospital a couple of months ago. They won't let me have my art, they're gonna try and take it away from me. Said they'll give it to a fucking charity shop! I did this, with my hands! Not with pencil and paint, my bare fucking hands. They're gonna take it away, the cunts. They know it's worth money, now they want to fucking take it away.'

Patrolling around, cider in one hand, bin-bag of paintings in the other, Jay canvases the group, encouraging people to comment on his work before switching without warning into paranoid-fugitive mode. Pressed at first to offer my own thoughts on his work, eventually Jay takes me through the painting himself, otherwise entitled as *Booth*. At the centre of the painting is *Booth House*, the infamous hostel just around the corner, described by another *Itchy Park* local as a prison constituted by *'narrow corridors full of noise and violence.'* The building is depicted deliberately as windowless in order to evoke the darkness of its recesses, a *'place where the curtains are always closed, to keep the light out whilst people do drugs.'* A revolving resident of these very corridors, Jay's vision depicts *Booth House*, and the temporary housing system in general, as a deeply flawed and contradictory space that at best bandages certain symptoms, and at worst perpetuates the same cycles of violence and alienation that constitute the very conditions of homelessness. The red-black motif that seeps through the painting aesthetically mirrors the colour scheme of the notorious *K-cider*, Jay's primary weapon of choice, manifesting itself along the side of the central building as if somehow structurally supporting it. The two concentric triangles (one built into the architecture of *Booth House* itself, the other lying conspicuously outside as if floating in a celestial river of blood; also K-like in colour composition) are said to represent the varying choice of drugs available on the street, formed from the windows that cannot be shown on the building's exterior. Shards of broken glass from the same invisible windows encircle two shrieking faces that lurk subterraneously beneath the building as if entangled in the hostel's very foundations. The shards are poised menacingly close to the faces, the omnipresent threat of puncture hanging over them the way that the needle hovers over addicted skin. The faces, with their gaping mouths, evoke the primeval horror captured in Edvard Munch's *The Scream*. There is, of course, a third shrieking face, aesthetically

homogenous with the others but with two key differences. First, it is distinctly *outside* the boundaries of the hostel's architectonics, coming into view as if emerging from some hidden place behind the building, a secret on the verge of being disclosed. Secondly, unlike the other two, this face *has a body*. Each of these faces, Jay tells me, are different versions of himself, specifically his alcoholic self.

At this point, with a nod to Jay's personal request for critique, I will briefly acquiesce to one of art's classic invitations, that of interpretation (at the same time embedding my interpretation within the dynamically overlapping spheres of ethnographic experience and anthropological theory). First, I would make a few comments on the painting's temporality, articulated most strikingly, I think, in the changing form of the three faces. Starting with the face in the bottom left hand corner, there is a particular vacancy to its features, its mouth and eyes drained of all colour and content, a stark emptiness that gives it the appearance of a mask with nothing beneath it. The same face, it should be noted, is not a self-enclosed entity, rather it flows into the structural form of the building itself, specifically the column that holds the can of *K-cider* at its core. This face captures the tragic realities of his own emptiness; an emptiness brought about by his slippage into the everyday violence of homelessness and hostel/street living, in which his brutalised sense of self, reduced as it is to the hollow form of the empty mask, is at one with an edifice that has drugs and alcohol built into its very foundations.

Held at once within and against the background of these possibilities-for-being, Jay's second face now begins to fill up, his mouth no longer empty but brimming with an obsidian darkness that echoes the can of cider's black integument. His eyes, vacant before, twist and contort into an abstract patternings, his left eye forming into an especially hypnotic spiral. Where before there were no clear boundaries between the face and the hostel, there is now a distinct separation, as if a new self, now alcoholically activated, is slowly beginning to form, peeling itself into existence as it were. Critically though, both faces, whilst still tethered to the hostel's bowels, remain bodiless; a profound reminder that part of the social death of homelessness is that you inevitably become a *no-body*. There is however, yet another more radical change hiding just

around the corner. Filled to the eyeballs with *K-cider*, a new face and thus a new self appears, not from within the semi-structured spaces of the hostel, but from the outside; an indeterminate space where red and black are no longer bound by the rigidity of formal containment, allowed instead to disintegrate and amorphously spread as liquid fills empty space. Emerging within this black-red alcoholic soup is the third self, his eyes all manic spirals, his mouth formed of concentric layers, of mouths swallowing other mouths. Partially obscuring this third face are three aces, the *Ace of Hearts* conspicuously missing, this coronary absence affirming that Jay's hand remains perpetually, indeed tragically incomplete.⁶² Of greater significance though, is that below this new face a body has emerged, or at least part of a body, everything but the upper-left torso remaining eclipsed by *Booth House*. This partial body, I posit, is the *somebody else* of Jay's blackouts, a new (partial) presence that, crucially, emerges from within a particular blind spot, creeping up on the first two faces from behind their backs; beyond the dual constraints of agency and memory.

Having now explored the multiple conditions of Jay's "situation" through the prism of his own *art brut*, we can see how his claim to be "the last of his kind" is a reflection of his own aching sense of isolation and imminent extinction; a mood of despair that is constituted by the lived realities of his own relational break(ing)down, the pinch of which is felt at the very core of his being. Indeed, as a socially "dead man" who, by virtue of his deepening relationship with alcohol, claims not to deserve his own family, we are confronted with a man cut adrift from all the human intimacy that had held him together until the point of abandonment, revealing a forgotten man caught up in an ongoing moment of debilitating existential crisis, facing a society that does not value him; relatable only through a feeling of bitter loss.

Besides his occasional forays into the world of paint and canvas, it is worthwhile recalling that Jay's sensitivity to his existential-relational predicament more often tends to rear its head through the bestial tearing of serrated metal over tender flesh, in which

⁶² The aces, according to Jay, symbolise the capriciousness of his life situation, of his life as part of an ongoing gamble that he is destined to lose; an idea captured profoundly in Strange's (1986) analysis of the modern political economy as constituted by a volatile form of "casino capitalism."

his anger at the world is absorbed into a kind of grotesque bodily performance. Furthermore, these alcoholic performances invariably occur in the midst of the blackout. The day following one of these blood-soaked incantations, Jay is invariably confused as to why the stitches in his mouth keep coming open, forced to interrogate the rest of the group in a bid to “fill in the blanks” of his own past experiences. As Ash’s vignette demonstrated, these “blanks” have already been filled in – filled by a “somebody else” whose present hardens around itself like a chrysalis, locking out the past and Jay in the same breath.

Jay’s assertion that he “becomes somebody else” when he blacks-out is a sentiment shared across my informants. Like Jay, all those who regularly found themselves blacking-out affirmed to me that in those moments, where memory gives way but the body keeps going, their personhood is overtaken by *somebody else* – a force-of-being that is not within the remit of their agentic powers. Likewise, the intoxicated person is generally perceived by the rest of the group in these moments to be a “different person.” To understand how the self “reinvents” itself into “somebody else” through extreme intoxication, we must turn again to the dissociative mechanics of the blackout, taking an extended look at its intrinsic temporality.

Lost Time

Analysed through the prism of ritual dehistoricification, we have seen how the addict, when in the midst of a blackout, abandons their presence as a means of (partial) existential recovery, losing their memory (but gaining a body) so that they can find the traction to re-enter the present. Furthermore, as I have already shown, they re-enter the present in a radically altered temporal form, as an entirely different *Dasein* altogether. In this sense, the addict only re-enters the present in a partial form, insofar as the recovered presence is effectively locked within the mimetic flesh of a lived absence, *the somebody else* (or in Perry’s case, the “lost time” of a body over-determined by Draconian interference). The question of why their recovery seems destined to remain agonisingly partial is an important one. Recall that for de Martino, on the larger or “collective” ritual

scale, the dehistoricizing step can be likened to cauterising a wound, to the extent that things get worse before they get better, so to speak. On the embodied scale, however, it is as if people become locked within the cautery, desperate to stem the blood flow but simultaneously unable to close the wound all the way up. In Jay's case, for example, the transcendent overkill of his daily drinking temporarily annihilates the normal temporal matrix of the self, short-circuiting the reproductive apparatus of memory and thus neutering both past and future, anchoring him, phantom-like, within the ossifying chrysalis of what Deleuze (2004) calls the "hardened present."

By interweaving Di Martino's theory of dehistoricification with Deleuze's analysis of drunkenness, we can see how the "I-have-drunk" of the near/immediate past (the "comet's tail" in James' terminology) rapidly displaces the captured/reproducible *memories* of sober life ("I-have-lost-everything"), incarcerating the new present/presence within the timeless "absence" of the blackout, in which the previously captured reproducible past has not only escaped containment, but turned itself inside-out so as to entrap and ossify around the new present. In this sense, the alcoholic "(memory) blank" is as much a slate as it is a space, an ontological *tabula rasa* on which emerge new selves to fill and constitute the void. Under these conditions, the memories, projects and identifications of sober life that once constituted the past's soft core are rapidly displaced by the immediacy of the near past – the moment of drinking – through which new identifications and reinventions of self and situation are made concrete, and at the same time the "real" past is transplanted further and further away to form the boundaries of the hardened present – locked out, as it were. In this way, the ossification of the present comes to constitute the lost time of the blackout, in which the "historical" past comes to harden around the now fading present (fading in the sense of dissolving from memory, on the verge of belonging to *somebody else*).

This is what Deleuze (*ibid*:180) means when he claims that the alcoholic 'does not live at all in the imperfect or the future; [he] has only a *past perfect*': I have-loved, I have-done, I have-seen, *I-have-lost*. The past perfect represents the simultaneous expression of the two moments, in which the past is neither left at a distance nor experientially

completed, rather it hangs around in the present at the formation of its hardened periphery, as the jettisoned object that both challenges and constitutes the limit. Approaching in this way, as a kind of abjectified border, we can begin to see the past in Kristeva's terms, as 'the violence of [melancholia] for an "object" that has already been lost, [as] an alchemy that transforms death drive into a start of life' (1982:15).



Fig. 4. *Lost Time*

The above drawing, entitled *Lost Time*, profoundly captures the “past-perfect” temporality of the blackout as experienced by Jay’s alcoholic self. As with the triad of tortured faces embedded in Jay’s other artwork, we are confronted with yet another

gaping mouth, or perhaps more accurately a gaping clock(face). Cutting diagonally through Jay's (clock)face is a second clock surrounded by a number of lines and circles that, according to him, represent powder and pills, flanked of course by the ubiquitous *K-cider*. The changing of the hour hand from one to three affirms that these clocks are not static objects, rather they constitute the flow of time and thus the simultaneous generation of past and future. As the drink and drugs kick in, however, this flow is radically disrupted, becoming frozen at the stroke of three, locking Jay in a "cracked" present and thus breaking its synthetic link with the past. As Jay himself describes it: *'The cracked clock is about the time I've lost through drink and drugs, when I don't know where or what I am anymore. Everything's broken.'* As one half of his face melts away from the other, we are confronted with a powerful double image, of Jay at once swallowing time and *being swallowed by it*; of time no longer fluid and motile but stalled and cracked, of a smashed clockface set against a swirling vortex of blackness. This sense of time being "out-of-joint" gives Jay's artwork a decidedly Derridean edge, as a hauntological self-portrait saturated by time, where time can only be experienced as disarticulated, as part of an ongoing and potentially fatal repetition.

Approached as a kind of lost time, we might describe the present of the blackout as constituted by a "deep" past that cannot be contained, and an immediate "shallow" past that is always already in the process of becoming lost, in reflexive terms at least. Accordingly, we can perhaps conceptualise the boundary of the hardened present as a thick layer of opaque flesh that you cannot see into or out from. It is this opacity that allows a person, once intoxicated, to transform into a presence without memory and, likewise, why, on sobering up, the same person has no memory of themselves as this presence. Instead they perceive themselves as a potentially horrifying absence. The blackout, by "locking out" the past and "hardening" the present, effectively disrupts the synthetic flow between the two tenses, creating a profound and jarring temporal dissonance that is experienced on the (sober) day-to-day level as pervasive feeling of blankness. In a way, these periods of lost time can perhaps be viewed as the embodied subversion of bored time: rather than enduring the seemingly endless stretches of nothingness built into the temporality of existential boredom, the blackout swallows up

these stretches and reconstitutes them into digestible blank “chunks” as it were, chunks that contain and under- rather than an over-abundance of time.

To add an even further dissonance to the mix, the flotilla of “blanks” left in the slipstream of each recurring blackout creates huge disruption to the normally uninterrupted flow of “reproducible” past, thus distorting and narrowing the future,⁶³ insofar as its usual reflexive currency – the recollectable past – has effectively been thrown down the drain, or, more accurately, palmed off to *somebody else*.

Temporarily incarcerated within a metahistorical present, the reflexive, constantly-updating-being of late-liberalism is replaced by a different being, a body-being that plays by an alternative set of ontological guidelines. This idea is captured, I suggest, by Deleuze’s affirmation that the alcoholic embodies ‘two moments at once’ (1990:179). In drinking to the point of blacking out, people such as Jay are “killing” not only time, but also, to one extent, themselves; that is to say *their selves*. As a perverse and yet creative form of temporary suicide, the blackout facilitates a particular dismembering and reassembling of the body; a process that allows the person in question to hold not just any old reality at a distance, but a reality (and thus also a self) constituted by chronic crisis. In this sense, the body-in-compound-crisis, through the temporal disjuncture intrinsic to blacking-out, creates a new labile form for itself, a new envelope as it were, that effectively puts crisis “on hold.” However, as has already been suggested through the earlier analogy of cautery, this new ductile state-of-being is something of a crisis unto itself (an idea substantiated by Perry’s tendency to continually get himself stuck in the blank space). Indeed, recalling the abject material conditions that constitute homelessness, in conjunction with the compound tragedies that shunt these persons into the melancholic flows of the uncanny, we can start to imagine this temporal suspension

⁶³ In non-anthropological settings, the connection between memory and the future has been extensively explored through studies of people who suffer from severe amnesia. Ultimately, the literature suggests that people who cannot recall and reproduce the past have great difficulty imagining and anticipating what their experiences might be like in the future. In other words, take away the past and you forfeit the future (Addis et al 2007; Hassabis et al. 2007b; Klein et al. 2002; Race et al. 2011; Romero and Moscovitch 2012; Tulving 1985).

of the blackout, these blank spaces, as a present that is trapped between a haunting past and an ever-narrowing future.

The blackout, I hope to have shown, is constituted by a radical yet precarious temporal hybridity, effectively ensnaring the body within an arrhythmic pattern of ongoing temporal disjuncture. Under these conditions, past and future detach and drift away from one another, creating a disfigured present that locks the addict into a particular modality-of-being. In these moments of lost time, we are bearing witness, I claim, to a kind of *demonic possession*. This then, to borrow from Bakhtin, is the moment ‘when a body transgresses its limits and a new one begins...One body offers its death [the sober/existentially bored self], the other its birth [the somebody else], but they are merged in a two bodied image’ (1968:322). Conceived in this manner, the blackout thus possesses its own carnivalesque logic, a turning inside-out of late liberal temporality, an embodied parody of the extracarnival life that sustains “normative” patterns of behaviour. I will probe considerably deeper into the carnivalesque logic of the intoxicated body in the upcoming chapters, using Bakhtin’s concept of “the grotesque” as a heuristic device with which to think through the political potential of the blacked-out body. For the time being, it will suffice to recall Bakhtin’s assertion that the fundamental characteristic of the grotesque is ‘to show two bodies in one: the one giving birth and dying, the other conceived, generated and born’ (*ibid*:26). In this sense, the phantasmic forces that surround, envelop and possess the addicts of *Itchy Park* will shortly be shown not to be solely personal demons, but *political demons* whose forms emerge conterminously from within the fabric of the late-liberal state itself.

Following in the intellectual footsteps of Pedersen (2011), Taussig (1997) and Navaro-Yashin (2002), by moving beyond the concept of state as a concrete and transcendental singularity, and emphasising instead its plurality and potential immanence, we will begin to see how, in the case of the addicted-homeless, the circuit of stately power (its “magic” in Taussig’s terms) can inadvertently imbue such bodies with a transformational potential – at once creative and destructive – that allows them to reconfigure themselves from singular entities into immanent multiplicities. To

demonstrate this proposed quadripartite link between the temporal, the relational, the body, and the political, I will be turning back to conceptual questions of what constitutes the addicted self, or, to be more precise, to the ways in which the homeless of *Itchy Park* can be described as demonically possessed.

Addiction as Possession: Giving Over Voice

In broad brushstrokes, possession refers to situations in which powerful outside forces take hold of human beings. According to Boddy (1994:410), the extreme “Otherness” of this phenomenon has rendered it a long-standing anthropological fetish, to the extent that there are arguably now as many “typologies” of possession as there are ethnographic accounts, a propensity that ‘can blind researchers to the complexity of the situations they describe.’ Without wanting to get dragged into this particular debate, I will simply say in the briefest terms possible that my framing of possession in this chapter eschews the “naturalising” or “therapeutic” approach,⁶⁴ adopting instead a more open-ended “existential” approach with an emphasis on social, political and bodily context.⁶⁵

As such, rather than linking my analysis of the blackout to any kind of “master narrative” on possession, I use the term as a means of *thinking through* the uncanny imbrication of the bodily world with that of “demonic” ghosts. In this sense, I will be exploring intoxicated possession as a corporeal and temporal reality unto itself, one that is firmly rooted within the assembled complexity of the homeless situation. Crucially, I am employing this analytical framework not to exoticise the residents of *Itchy Park*, but rather to build a conceptual model of homeless addiction that appropriately captures the haunting ethnographic reality I encountered over the course of my fieldwork. As I hope to have already demonstrated, this reality is over-flowing with uncanny ghostly forces; forces that saturate not just their material and social conditions, but also the conjoined echo-chambers of their bodies and memories.

⁶⁴ See Lewis (1971, 1986), and Ward (1980, 1989).

⁶⁵ For a select few examples from what is an enormous corpus of writing, of which there is not space in this thesis to cover, see Boddy (1988, 1994) Kapferer (1983) Kleinman (1980) and Lambek (1981, 1988)

Indeed, it is worth noting that “to be addicted” comes from the Latin *addicere* – *to give my voice over to*. In the Roman context, this “giving of voice” was an intrinsically spiritual act, insofar as it constituted an act of religious devotion, a dedication or *surrender* of one’s self to the Divine. It is thus perhaps equally telling that in the domain of Roman Law, a person that could not repay their debts could be forced into slavery by the courts, becoming what was known as an *addictio* (Schaffer and Kidman 2003). Viewed through this lens, spirit possession and addiction are both concerned with the way in which a person forfeits their voice and body to forces more powerful than themselves. Within the *Itchy Park* context, these forces, these demonic creditors, were borne of the uncanny echoes of a haunting past that simply would not dissipate.

The Blackout: An Instance of Expersonation

In approaching the blacked-out body from this angle, it is useful to recall Crapanzano’s definition of spirit possession as ‘any altered state of consciousness indigenously interpreted in terms of the influence of an *alien spirit*’ (1977:7) [my emphasis]. Furthermore, we might also recall that Perry refers to the blank space as a kind of trance – the state of consciousness that is, above all others, inherently related to the experience of possession.

Approached as a kind a magical substance that induces trance, we can draw parallels between psychoactive drugs and the shamanic gown of inner Mongolia; as a similar sort of “hyper-surface” that ‘enacts a vista of multi-layered dimensions... [in which] the world of humans and the world of spirits are simultaneously collapsed from both sides’ (Pedersen 2011:163-164). In contrast to the trance state described by Boddy (1988) in her ethnography of the Hofriyati of North Sudan, in which the self of the possessed woman is actively *engaged* through the transcendent power of the experience itself, the addicts of *Itchy Park* undergo narcotic trance as a means of *abandoning* their selves. This self-abandonment occurs as a result of being *over-connected* to the haunting power of lost Others. Significantly, whilst these forces are “alien spirits” or “non-selves,” they

are simultaneously social beings, insofar as they contain with them the tragic history of their relations with the living.

Adopting a similar stance in his reflections on possession rituals amongst the Malagasy, Michael Lambek (2003) suggests that the break in consciousness that characterises trance is at the same time a “bridge” to other beings. For the addicts of *Itchy Park*, the trance-like state of the blackout is perhaps better thought of as a *drawbridge* – a radical closing out of time, self, agency and memory that ipso facto ushers in anOther self – the somebody else.

It is this raising of the temporal drawbridge that marks the blacked-out body as an uncanny being, the hardened present opaquely encompassing the intoxicated self the way a moat encircles a besieged castle. From this perspective, the daily blackouts experienced by Perry, Jay and their contemporaries can now be thought of in terms of demonically influenced trance. This idea enables us to think about the blacked-out body in “plural” terms – insofar as it is within the *blank space* that the addicted self truly does become “lost” to demonic interferences, alien spirits whose hold on him develops through the contingent entanglement of traumatic relational losses with socio-political and material abjection, ultimately entombing him within the mimetic flesh of a possessed body (or a Draconian body in Perry’s terms).

There is another long-standing thread running through the literature on spirit possession, specifically the idea that these states-of-being can be viewed as a kind of “embodied critique” of modernity – the perfect counterpoint to the Western ideals of autonomous individuality. There is certainly value in this idea, especially when considering the struggles of those enduring the destructive legacy of colonialism or other ongoing forms of political oppression (Comaroff 1985; Echard 1991; Morsy 1981; Stoller 1995). However, cases of spirit possession need not be limited to non-Western contexts, as my ethnographic material purports to show. Indeed, as the living, breathing leftovers of modern capitalism, this notion of “embodied critique” seems especially relevant for those enduring the plight of homelessness. Furthermore, it is also worth remembering

that the mimetic capacity of humans to “become Other” is not exclusive to instances of spirit possession. Indeed, outside this field of study, anthropology has long held an interest in the human capacity for transformation, viewing mimesis and metamorphosis as intrinsic components of the human condition (*see* Ishii 2013; Taussig 1993; Taylor 1996; Vilaça 2005; Viveiros de Castro 1988a; to name but a few). That being said, the existential conditions that constitute possession are especially ripe for experiences of perspective alternation, self-transcendence, corporeal metamorphosis, and performative mimesis. So, whilst one need not be possessed (narcotically or otherwise) in order to transform one’s self in relation to others, one of my central claims is that the human potentiality to self-transform is made explicitly manifest during the blackout trance.

In thinking of intoxication in terms of possession and trance, in which subjects are continually reinvented into other selves through the ritualisation of the body, the metamorphic boundaries that constitute addiction ought now to be significantly clearer. Indeed, an ethnographic descent into a person like Perry’s lifeworld can help us to unpick the juxtaposed scaffolds of marginal existence and uncover new and potentially radical modalities of being-in-the-world, conceptualised here as a kind of continuous “betwixt-ness” through which social realities, and the relations that underwrite them, are negotiated and made visible (not to mention how they are hidden).

Following Roy Wagner, blacked-out possession might thus be considered as an example of “expersonation.” In contrast to *impersonation*, which involves a ‘mere copying of its subject...and thus necessarily an exaggeration of some features and consequent omission or downgrading of others,’ *expersonation* ‘reverses this process, and registers more concrete particularity than is found in the original, so that the original becomes a *de facto* impersonation of it’ (2012:162). As a kind of everyday “pretending,” impersonation involves the cherry-picking or “subtracting” of certain actions from an individual, the subsequent mimicking of which sets the parameters for the impersonation. Expersonation, on the other hand, adjoins novel meanings onto the very phenomenon upon which it imitates. From this perspective, the blacked-out body *expersonates* the ghost-demons that haunt it by imitating a version that had never existed before; namely the *overdetermined* form of the “somebody else.” In other words,

Jay's blacked-out body is more than just a ghostly "double," becoming not only a ghost that lives, *but a ghost that lives in a particular way*.⁶⁶ Part self-hostage and part self-immolation, the blackout is constituted by a temporal sleight-of-hand in which metaphors ("becoming somebody else") come alive, a figure-ground reversal in which memories of absence are converted into the absence of memories.

In taking the "somebody else" to be an instance of expersonation, we can begin to understand the possession-trance of the blackout as what Gregory Bateson might have called a *positive negation*, in which the emergent human being is neither the subject ("presence") nor its antithesis ("absence"). As a novel "re-invention" of self, blacked-out being is, as I hope to have shown, an *obviate* being; one that is, like a demonic ghost, neither living nor dead. To reinforce these ideas, it is worth exploring in greater detail the tripartite connection between socio-political alienation, spirit possession, and intoxicants. To aid in this quest, I will be engaging with the quasi-shamanic condition of *agsan* explored by Morten Axel Pedersen (2011), the aim being to situate homeless drug addiction within wider anthropological debates surrounding the plurality of the (intoxicated) body, and by extension exploring the political potential of these destratified subjectivities/perspectives.

Addiction: A "Quite Shamanic" Phenomenon

Whilst the object of his ethnographic investigation was never explicitly addiction per se, Pedersen, in his brilliant study of proto-shamanic forces in post-socialist Mongolia, unwittingly stumbled upon several of the themes that have so far made up the core of this thesis. Pedersen explores the re-emergence of untamed shamanic power through the condition of *agsan* – a hysterical state of alcoholic rage that is driven by potent

⁶⁶ In Perry's case, what was intended as a shortcut to the other side of the blank space turns out instead to be something of a wrong turn, his daily reliance on drugs and alcohol inadvertently becoming the very thing that ensnares him within the Draconian web. Over-exposed and over-vulnerable to the demonic surges that pervade this sub-transitional sphere, Perry is continuously rendered over-determined by these forces and subsequently locked into stalled, anaesthetic, essentially *demonic* possession trance – an embodied *expersonation* of the very Draconian interferences he so desperately seeks to transcend.

nonhuman forces during which a person is not considered to be the author of his own acts. In Natanson's (1974:250) terms, the *agsan* individual 'is "not himself," he is another, a demonic possibility of his being.'⁶⁷

Pedersen attributes the rise of these *agsan* "half-shamans" to the three simultaneous, intimately entangled socio-political events: the ontological breakdown engendered by the fall of socialism, the unregulated explosion of free-market economic policies, and the resurgence of untamed shamanic spirits. With the collapse of socialism, these divergent forces have, according to Pedersen, coalesced to form a new ontological field that is as fragile as it is capricious. In this sense, the sudden transition (what amounted ontologically to a state of total rupture) to liberal capitalism marked the Pandora-style re-opening of latent occult sensibilities that were always there, hidden and repressed under the totalising veil of socialism.⁶⁸

'In being the instrument of occult forces whose manifestation is beyond his control, the *agsan* person is like a shaman, but not quite...he embodies potent nonhuman forces. But whereas shamans can decide when and for what purpose they lose their minds and allow nonhuman beings to take up temporary residence in their bodies, *agsan* persons and other potential shamans resemble newborn children, inexperienced hunters who offend the spirit masters of the game...their souls all too easily lured away' (2011:4).

In this sense, the *agsan*-inclined half-shamans operate as an embodied nexus for the diverse and contradictory effects and affects of postsocialist transition during the millennial turn of northern Mongolia. The lack of "proper" shamans meant that these untamed forces could not be controlled as they would have been in pre-socialist times. Thinking through Pedersen's analysis of his "not quite shamans," I propose that the ritualising of the body through drug addiction can be viewed as an irreducible aspect of

⁶⁷ Cited in Kapferer (1979:128).

⁶⁸ From his perspective, these "half-shamans" were magnets to the wandering souls of dead shamans and wild animals, only they lacked the material and cultural legitimacy with which to engage with and control these spirits. Hopelessly open to *agsan*, these young "driverless" men are both (over)open and (over)multiple, foreclosed from becoming complete shamans due to the political purges that would otherwise have provided senior shamans to sanction and guide their transitions.

late-liberal capitalism, even going so far as to liken it to an occult/“quite shamanic” phenomenon; so long as we appreciate the manner in which this term relates to the chaotic state of cultural and political upheaval that constituted Thatcherite liberalism and its ongoing aftershocks.

Approaching the blackout as a kind of possession then, is about understanding the embodied forms of being that emerge from the helical entwinement of phantasmic excess and late-liberal alienation. As a distinctly modern kind of bodily ritual, blacking-out is not only a technique of the self, but a technique of *self-forgetting*, one that presupposes the interlocking of certain relationships, or more specifically their absence(s). As I hope to have shown, these absences, and the deep solitude that they invariably engender, leave people highly exposed to demonic forces.

In Sri Lanka, as on London’s park benches, people are especially vulnerable to the demonic gaze when they are alone. In Sri Lanka, the term, *tanikama*, Kapferer tells us: ‘is a term that refers not only to the physical aloneness of a patient, but also the patient’s psychological aloneness’ (1979:115). It is not a stretch to suggest that the gross existential isolation felt by many of London’s homeless addicts could thus also be described as *tanikama*; for they, as I have thus far argued, more than any other in our society, are never too far from the demonic gaze. In this sense, the phantoms that haunt the addict can be seen as “living” social forms, that *are forces* rather than simply having force. Excessive intoxication thus emerges as a way of acting “quite shamanic” without being a shaman. It is, to borrow a phrase from Pedersen, a “vernacular mode of possession” – the consequences of which are a particular kind of demonisation of the body. To explore this process of spirit possession via narcotics in greater depth, I will now turn to Kapferer’s (1979, 1983) classic study of Sri Lankan exorcism rituals, utilizing in particular his Meadian analysis of the possession process.

Self, Other and Exorcist

In Sri Lanka, as in London's social peripheries, demonic possession/ghostly attack is marked by an increasingly drastic withdrawal from normal social interaction, often manifesting in unruly bodily states. For the homeless, this radical withdrawal is constituted by the self-erasing temporality of the blacked-out body – in which their extrication from the normal flow of time occurs inextricably with their disjoining from normal social life. I have chosen the word “disjoining” specifically to evoke its Latin derivative – *dissociare*. In referring to the state of possession as “dissociative,” the trance condition thus presupposes a simultaneous “disjoining” from the social *and* the temporal, from normative configurations of self and time. In this sense, the dissociation/disjoining constitutes a state-of-being that plays to its own existential-ontological beat. Indeed, as Crapanzano (1977) notes, most trance states are perceived as powerful dislocations from the normal structures of social life. In this sense, the trancer is defined by the abandonment of his normal socially-constructed self – an idea that is continually reaffirmed throughout Kapferer's various works on the subject.

Once exposed to demonic attack, the Sinhalese person is, Kapferer tells us, quite literally “not themselves” – rather they are transformed into a dangerous and polluting Other through the malevolent forces of supramundane beings. In Kapferer's ethnographies, the ensuing loss of self disrupts normal kin relations, creating an “abnormality” that stalls the mutual sharing of knowledge that sustains everyday social interactions. As the episodes of demonic attack get progressively worse, the patient rapidly loses grip of her self, suspending normal conduct for what amounts to the pathology of demonic interaction; a problem that must be put right through ceremonial exorcism.

According to Kapferer, ‘the identification of a patient as a victim of demonic attack establishes a social process that operates to subvert and reverse the processes that lead to the construction of a demonic Self’ (*ibid*:119). An elemental part of this social process is the ritualised *performance* of exorcism – it is the primary vehicle through which the

demonically afflicted Self is re-negotiated and rescued from negation. In the ritual, the patient is already a demonic Other, her condition a kind of existential hell that is defined above all by its solitude. Accordingly, the ceremony is above all directed at social reintegration, a means of brining the victim back into the fold of normal everyday relations. Through drumbeat, song, dance and possession trance, the “performance” of exorcism endows the victim’s internal despair an external form, allowing the demonic to manifest itself in the human world, thereby placing the subjective experience of demonic possession under the collective social microscope. The presence of the demonic patient thus provokes a heightened sense of intersubjective awareness among the audience, forcing them to evaluate and objectivate their most axiomatic We-relationships: the result of which is the re-actualisation of those very relationships. Having established this sensitivity to self and Other amongst those watching, the exorcist begins to comically ridicule the demon, a subversive shift that re-establishes cultural order and draws both patient and audience back into a shared understanding of social life.

Kapferer posits that exorcists are essentially specialists in matters of Self and Other, ordained with a cohesive body of knowledge against which clients can measure their common-sense understandings of how, and under what conditions, a self is fashioned. The diagnostic power of an exorcist is therefore contingent on his ability to elaborate and mediate the connection between ghostly/demonic power and human illness. Subordinated by demons, the patient’s lifeworld becomes imbued with the chaotic and frightening features of the demonic reality; a saturation so total that ‘the patient is understood as having a unidimensional view of his or her social reality in which every action and identity of others is referred to the malign world of demons’ (*ibid*).

In perspectivist terms, the exorcist ritual enables the rest of the family to *become* the patient’s “point of view,” as it were, re-establishing a relational link that is degraded during the initial stages of illness, wherein the patient is avoided and interaction heavily restricted. Ontologically speaking, the demonised patient is a risk not only to herself, but others as well. To exorcise efficaciously, therefore, the exorcist must probe not only into

the inner world of the patient, but also into the wider social context that constitutes the person's relationships - the intersection of which, Kapferer argues, makes up the "normal" Self.

The Sinhalese exorcism rite thus marks the transformation of the patient's world – at once "re-representing" the negation of the victim's social Self but also reconciling this dissolution by establishing a socio-ritual context in which the demonic patient can "reobjectivate" a "me" that fits in with the conduct of normal Others who constitute the audience of the ritual event. Having laid out the core ideas of his ethnographic account, I will use the next section to explore how Kapferer's detailed reading of G.H. Mead might also be applicable to my own theory of narcotic possession.

The Meadian Lens

As already discussed, the relational break(ing)down of homelessness is constituted by a similar dissolution of Self that precipitates a kind of existential collapse. I have since reconfigured the relationality-temporality of the blacked-out body ("becoming someone else") as a kind of demonic trance – what Kapferer calls a process of "negation" – otherwise defined as the loss of "self-consciousness." According to G. H. Mead (1934), the genesis of "self-consciousness" rests on a mutual awareness that the Self's "I" (the unique and inimitable character of the self) is dialogically related to the Self's "me" (the reflexive understanding of the self as an object of the Other). In this sense, the "normal" Self is constituted by the reciprocal interpenetration between the "I" and the "me."

I am therefore suggesting that once under the psychotropic influence of drugs, this reciprocal interpenetration becomes distorted. In other words, when demonically obviated through alcohol and drugs, the person's "I" and "me" step out of harmony. Once under the "influence" of his drug-demons, the homeless addict becomes objectified into a radically transformed "me" where his self is consumed by the totalising forces of the demonic-narcotic. In the Sri Lankan context, the afflicted person's kin take them not be the normal Other taken-for-granted in everyday

interaction, rather they are re-conceived as a demonic Other. For the homeless addict, the transformation into the narcotic Other is marked by a twofold process of objectification. Firstly, by virtue of their ongoing (and highly contested) occupancy of public space, the narcotic Other stands in direct opposition to the “socially acceptable” Other that constitutes the “normal” moral fabric of everyday life. This sparks a breakdown in the reciprocal “I-me” dynamic that constitutes the “healthy” social self. In point of fact, the often unruly and sometimes violent episodes of intoxicated dissociation enacted by homeless persons serve to further disrupt the interaction between the “I” and the Other – compounding the demonisation process, dissolving the normal “me” and reifying a narcotic (socially polluting) “me” in its place.

Secondly, the addict, once he returns to the sober world of normal convention, reflexively objectifies his blacked-out body as a narcotic other, as “being somebody else” – a ghostly demon walking among the living, as it were. Through this twofold process, the objective “blacked-out me” is thus sustained not by the conventional interplay of “I” with the social Other but by the interaction of “I” with drugs and demons. That addicts conceive themselves as continually “caught up in a battle with their demons” is a cultural statement to this effect.

Under the “demonised” and non-reflexive conditions of the blackout, the demonic-narcotic “me” subsumes the inimitable “I” of the social sober Self. In other words, the obviational temporality of the blackout effectively short-circuits the normal “me” of the conventional Self by reinventing it into a “somebody else” – such that the addict is no longer themselves as socially/soberly conceived, instead becoming totally absorbed into the demonic temporality-relationality of the blackout. In this sense, the “multiple Selves” that constitute a person’s ongoing social experience becomes a single demonic-narcotic Self; what Kapferer refers to as ‘the Jungian “shadow”, or the dark characteristics of the human personality that are normally suppressed by culture and social convention’ (*ibid*:118).

The Politics of DIY: Auto-Exorcisms

As a tool for thinking through the social complexities of possession and exorcism, Kapferer's ethnographic insight is invaluable. However, as with any kind of cross-cultural comparison, there are invariably limitations and dead-ends, especially when comparing contexts as disparate as rural Sri Lanka and urban London. Indeed, it not my intention to suggest that the exorcism of Sinhalese demons and extreme drug-taking in *Itchy Park* can be somehow directly transposed onto on another. That being said, just because each of these ethnographic contexts reveals a form of social existence obviously divergent from the other should not obscure the possibility that certain existential features of human being might well be common across both. In other words, the demonic forces that stalk Kapferer's ethnography and those of *Itchy Park* are undoubtedly different, but perhaps *not so different*. As such, using what Laidlaw (2013) calls the "ethnographic imagination," it is imminently possible, perhaps even methodologically advisable, to use the concepts intrinsic within one ethnographic setting to think through the forms of life that arise in another – an anthropological version of *serious play*.

Recall in the previous chapter my assertion that because of the alienating conditions of modernity, the homeless have de facto been forced to become their own healers. Indeed, it does not require an extensive cross-cultural study to establish that central London is not flush with formal exorcists like Kapferer's Sri Lanka. Not only that, addiction is not culturally (or conceptually) understood here as a demonic or ghostly affliction, rather it remains overwhelmingly harnessed to the pathologising discourse of biomedicine – as a disease of mind, body and will that lays dormant in the depths of a person's individual makeup. In this sense, London's homeless addicts have neither the attuned social field nor the cultural specialists to aid them in the exorcising of their relative demons.

However, rather than playing it safe and heading ever-deeper into the biomedical rabbit hole, this thesis argues that there is far greater anthropological value in exploring addiction through the conceptual prisms of possession and exorcism. Indeed, the present

chapter has been concerned with demonstrating that the “vicious cycle” of street addiction is not the constrictor-like growth of physical or psychic dependency posited by “exposure” inclined addictionologists, rather the “cycle” (if that remains the word in play) is far better understood as the ongoing concretisation or expersonation of tragic loss. In this sense, the daily cycle of blacking out and waking up alive renders vivid the embodied alternation between ghostly and human states-of-being. Indeed, within the context of *Itchy Park*, it is my position that the addicted body should be viewed above all as a permeable boundary, a *threshold* where ghostly and human forms intersect and are transformed into constituents of a demonic dynamic. So, evoking the spirit of serious play summoned earlier, I find myself asking two key questions: what happens on social-phenomenological level when a possessed person is forced to become their own exorcist? To what extent can we say describe the homeless-addict as simultaneously exorcist, victim and demon?

In the case the homeless addicts occupying *Itchy Park*, for whom the ritual setting is the body itself, the almost total lack of culturally sanctioned exorcists means that when they make the dehistoricizing step into the unruly state of the blackout they become stalled in Sartre’s moment of “magicality” – a field of consciousness in which human and demon are drawn into the same corporeal reality. At this point I should like to draw out an important distinction between the demons of Sri Lankan ontology and those of the homeless variety. Where the Sri Lankan demons exist as a perpetual component of the supernatural order (often emerging in the wake of relational breakdowns, such as through the death of kin or sorcery) the homeless ghost-demons that make up this thesis belong to a different ontological register. Their form is inherently more labile, developing out of the tragic absences that occur through the break(ing)down of homelessness – a rupture that is simultaneously relational, temporal and political. In Kapferer’s ethnography, it is demonic possession that catalyses a “negation of Self.” Homeless addiction, I posit, represents a reversal of this polarity, insofar as it is the “negation of Self” that catalyses the movement into demonic possession. This process, I have thus far argued, occurs through the transformative containment of narcotic surrogacy, in which a person’s relational bond with their anaesthetic of choice triggers a

radical shift in temporality, the consequence of which is a body-being that *expersonates* the very forces it seeks to transcend.

Herein lies the key paradox of addiction as seen through a demonic lens. Recall that the addict, in the wake of a relational severance, begins to experience that loss as a phantom/absent-presence; as when Lisa started to hear her dead partner's voices, or when Collette saw her brother appear as a shadow in her bedroom. This is the first stage of the demonisation process, where the lost Other begins to take on an increasingly phantasmal form – an absence felt as a presence. As this initial ghostly presence starts to take a greater hold on a person's already disintegrating sense of Self, the addict turns to drugs as way of shoring up their increasingly rickety existential-relational foundations. This turn to drugs is constituted by a paradoxical desire. On the one hand, the addict is looking to exorcise the demon(s) created by the tragic conditions of his homelessness - to "wipe away the pain" and "take [one]Self out of it." On the other hand, the addict's bondage with the drug through the mechanics of surrogacy (as a means of rescuing the "negated Self") represents the doomed desire to create a symbiotic relationship with the lost Other – to recover that which has been taken.⁶⁹ The result is the simultaneous negation of both desires. Rather than exorcising the demon(s), narcotic surrogacy actually "fleshes out" the demon through a kind of zygotic expansion in which demon and drug extend mitotically into one another, entombing the self within the newly formed layers of expersonate demonic flesh.

It is through this perverse process of drug-demon embryogenesis that the addict finds themselves thrust into the "magicality" of intoxication – wherein the "terrible intimacy" between drug and demon engenders a dissociative trance state in which the person is at once relationally and temporally transformed. In an ironic twist of tragic proportions, it is thus precisely through the addict's attempt at "auto-exorcism" that he constructs the very ghost-demon that comes to possess them. This symbiotic fusion between spirit and substance means that drugs will simultaneously operate as medium for both exorcism

⁶⁹ In this sense, the "need" for a drug to "get through things" represents the simultaneous desire for expulsion and symbiosis.

and possession. In Turnerian terms, we can talk of this double-edged experience as a kind of “extended liminality,” insofar as the magical alterity of the blackout – becoming somebody else – operates at once as a prison and an escape route. This vivification of loss through drugs is a poignant example of the way in which, for the homeless, the dead can often be closer to them than the living. Indeed, within this lies the political form of narcotic melancholy, a mode of being-in-the-world-with-others (*mitsein*) that above all is constituted by “being-inside-loss.”

In the Sri Lankan context, the demon emerges as a social reality only once it has been formally recognised by the exorcist. In this sense, the demon owes both its construction and its de-construction to the complex relationality of ritual action. Indeed, Kapferer (1979) notes how, in major ceremonies, the exorcist also becomes possessed by the very demonic presence that he is trying to expel. Likewise, for the addict, it is through his narcotic “auto-exorcism” that the ghost-demon takes its most powerful ontological form. The difference is that, in the Sri Lankan case, an ontologically attuned “We” audience ensures that the tripartite connection between exorcist, demon and victim is severed and then re-configured through the dynamic machinery of relationally-driven ritual action – in which the demonic victim returns to the healthy social Self, the demons return to the “separate” world from whence they came, and the exorcist de-possesses himself from the demonic presence(s), thus legitimising his social position as a culturally sanctioned healer. In the homeless case, however, the complex web of relations between exorcist, demon and victim is condensed within the boundaries of a single ritualised body – three for the price of one, so to speak.

We might, with this in mind, go so far as to suggest the “doubling-up” of the blacked-out body is, in actual fact, ultimately more akin to a “tripling-up,” in which the addict is forced to take on the burden of being exorcist, demon and victim all at once.⁷⁰ In this sense, the homeless addict can be described as composed of three distinct but overlapping layers of agency, some human and others demonic. The problem, as I hope to have demonstrated, is that in the absence of a social Otherness (i.e. the simultaneous

⁷⁰ One addict *triprosopos* (“having three faces”).

emergence and intermeshing of a culturally attuned “We” audience, a sanctioned exorcist, and a demonologically orientated medical discourse) that is equipped to legitimise the rescue of the afflicted Self from demonic forces, the possessed bodies of *Itchy Park* lost a vast portion of what Deleuze and Guattari (2013) might call their “transformational value.”

This, I posit, is what Zoja was getting at when he talked of a drug’s proclivity for making “false promises.” However, where Zoja located such empty promises in the general dissolution of archetypal ritual structures on a historical scale, I have located them in an embodied network of perpetually incomplete, ritually transformed relationships. By virtue of this “three-in-one” process, the “quite shamanic” homeless addict is, I posit, socio-culturally and politically “destined”⁷¹ to remain within permanent reach of the very demons that they have tried so desperately to escape. As this chapter draws itself to a close, I will now offer some thoughts on the “impossible form”⁷² of the addicted self, thinking through in particular how these forms have come to fill ontological (and perspectival) gaps left open in the wake of late-liberal socio-economic reform.

Addiction’s Impossible Form

In the words of Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, the “impossible form” of the addicted Self can perhaps be described as someone who ‘has too little body insofar as [he] possesses too many bodies’ (2007:161). This, I suggest, is also what Deleuze (2004) was getting at when he talks of an addict’s self-annihilation *going on behind their back*. It is supposedly in these “notorious” moments of self-destruction that the addicted body is at

⁷¹ I use this term not in the typical sense of divine or supramundane intervention, but rather in terms of what João Biehl (2005) would call the over-determining machinery of social death that banishes marginal people from the field of social and political visibility.

⁷² This is the term Pedersen uses to describe labile forms that arise from the isomeric entanglement between the invisible power of the spirits and the opaque forces of the market. This notion allows him to conceptualise Ulan-Uul’s half-shamans as ‘neither fully singular nor fully double, whose fate is to be the impossible forms giving the forces of ceaseless transition a (post)human body’ (2011:180). Given my own ideas pertaining to the complex entanglement between demonic forces, addiction, and the capricious relational-temporal structures of late-liberal capitalism, my borrowing of this term does not feel frivolous.

the greatest risk of “bursting” – otherwise described as the point where a person’s life no longer “makes sense” (that is to say it empties itself of transformational value). The validity of Deleuze’s observations will be discussed in far greater depth over the remaining chapters. For now, enough has been said to show that the demonic realities of homeless addiction described and analysed over the previous two chapters are distinct ontological conditions unto themselves. As with the *agsan* persons drunkenly tearing up the social fabric in 1990s Mongolia, the blacked-out and “demonic” bodies of *Itchy Park* are, I claim, possessed by transitional spirits in their own right. Indeed, I cannot help wondering if, to evoke Taussig (1997), it is within these incomplete and impossible bodies that we might find more than a few traces of the “magic” of the late-liberal British state; stitched as it were into the grotesque folds of blacked-out being?

Although the remaining two instalments of this thesis will confront this question in far greater depth than is possible at such a late stage in this chapter, I will nevertheless attempt to make some provisional comments on the “political magic” of the blacked-out body through what Viveiros de Castro calls “ontological perspectivism” (or “multinaturalism”) – the idea that it is not different human cultures that are relative to one another but nature that is relative to itself. His “perspectivism” is couched in the idea that the Amerindian cosmos is constituted by multiple perspectives that dwell latently in different types of ductile bodies. The bodies of Amerindian thought – whereby jaguars and hunters metamorphosise into one another across perspectivist boundaries – are not bodies in the Western sense of some fixed physical form; rather they are constantly shifting assemblages of ‘affects, dispositions or capacities which render every different species unique’ (Viveiros de Castro 1988a:478).

What happens then, if we deploy Viveiros de Castro’s critical lens outside of the Amazonian forest, using it instead to ask what form homelessness takes from the point of view of “different” late-liberal political bodies – specifically homeless addicts? For if perspectivism can loosely be described as ‘the process of discrete switching of points of view between forms of agency populating the cosmos’ it is relevant to ask: what might

late-liberal politics look/feel like from a homeless-addicted perspective? As Pedersen puts it: ‘What does it take to see – and be seen –with different bodies?’ (2011:62).

When applied to the context of homeless drug addiction, Pedersen’s question becomes especially pertinent when considering the temporal hybridity of the black-out. Just as within Amerindian perspectivism, in which the metaphysical continuity of a cosmogenic human spirit allows for perspectival overlap at the level of the body, such that the point of view creates the subject; so too the perspectivist boundaries of the blacked-out body experience a kind of overlap, albeit in a far more paradoxical and potentially totalising fashion.

In the case of the Amerindian shaman, his metaphysical continuity allows him to slip in and out of different corporeal envelopes, assuming different perspectives and, critically, returning to tell the tale. In the case of “becoming somebody else” through blacking-out however, the emergence of a different bodily form is ultimately not marked by a shared perspective, insofar as, owing to the memory-blank, the possibility of (partial) perspectival overlap instead gives way to a kind of (total) perspectival *eclipse* – in which returning to tell the tale is de facto out of the question. In this sense, the moment of blacking out and becoming somebody (*some body*) else is constituted by a severance of ontological continuity at both the physical and metaphysical level, such that the new body-being that emerges is effectively experienced as an entirely different person altogether, with an entirely different soul (or self) at its bodily core.

Like an *agsan* half-shaman torturously trapped within the somatic envelope of an alternative natural form, the blacked-out point-of-view totally occults its sober namesake, in the process creating a new kind of (political) subject that does not share a perspective but *is* a radically new perspective unto itself. In these moments of perspectival eclipse, where a new soul is transplanted within a historically absent (dehistorified) body, a novel (demonic) presence is thus formed, one constituted by *the simultaneous expression of metaphysical and physical discontinuity*: Neither my body nor my soul.

Emerging from the shadows of this double discontinuity are complex question of agency and, by extension, discipline. After all, if the point-of-view is a subject in its own right, and yet by virtue of its sheer opacity a point-of-view that can never be reflexively accessed, to what extent can the blacked-out body be described as “agented,” in Viveiros de Castro’s terms? This, I intend to show, is ultimately a question of politics or, more specifically, of abject body politics. Indeed, unlike their economically productive counterparts, the blacked-out bodies (and perspectives) of *Itchy Park* live only in the hardened present, with no future to look ahead into, and no past that solidifies that forward anticipation. Without this dual anchor of a mirrored past/future, the chronopolitical fabric of the late-liberal state, I submit, produces certain “loose ends” that are themselves infused with “deictic” properties, in the sense that its divergent ‘attributes are immanent in the viewpoint, and move [opaquely] with it’ (1998a:477).

With free-market forces unleashed to an extent never experienced before in history, the British people finds themselves in a position that is now all too familiar, namely living under the corpocratic shadow of a state that creates the very markets it is morally forbidden to regulate; markets that favour redistribution over generation, competition over compassion, and commercial choice over social welfare. It is a central claim of this thesis that this (failed) statehood has come to saturate the perspectival flesh of homeless-addicted bodies in a way that makes any person caught up in this trapdoor irreversibly political. In this sense, the British state can now be said to exist in a kind of onto-political multiplicity, in which each point of view is not only installed, but also *concealed* in a distinct body, ‘or more precisely a partly connected and yet partly detached assemblage of corporeal affects’ (Pedersen 2011:63). Like the Amerindian hunter, who does not have but *is* the point of view of the jaguar, every citizen, the homeless being no exception, *is* the point of view of a certain deictic attribute of the state in the alienating present that sustains capitalism in late-liberal modernity. Indeed, having thus far explored homelessness as the collateral damage of late-liberalism, exploring the ethical and political limits of this abjection will be of paramount concern over the forthcoming chapters.

The previous two chapters have tried to meaningfully pick up the gauntlet laid down by Henare, Holbraad and Wastell (2007:15), namely that ‘an anthropological analysis [should have] little to do with trying to determine how other people think about the world. It has to do with how we must think in order to conceive of a world the way they do.’ This shift, what Holbraad and his contemporaries call the “recursive” step in anthropology, amounts to a reflexive changing of the theoretical guard; an attempt to go beyond ‘the form of the object of analysis to the form of the analysis itself’ (Pedersen 2011:221) – a step that I have tried to honour through my ethnographic and conceptual engagement with the ghostly and demonic forces coursing through the addicted bodies of *Itchy Park*.

On London’s late-liberal park benches, demonic possession and political affect, drug-addiction and tragic capitalism, are mutually imbricated in ways that fundamentally transform the way in which homeless people relate to their world and the constellation of Others that exist within (and without) it. In the chapters that follow, I will extend this analysis, exploring addiction both as a distinct genre of political performance/performativity as well as particular technology of self-transformation; as an ethics of escape unto itself. These ideas can therefore be situated within the increasingly wide arc of the “ethical turn” currently occurring within anthropology, in which the ethnographic study of ethics has begun gradually to step out from the rather long shadows cast by the custodians of traditional moral philosophy (Das 2007; Fassin 2008; Laidlaw 2013; Lambek 2010; Mahmood 2003; Throop 2010; Zigon 2014). As part of this ongoing break from dogmatic assertions of what it means to live “the good life,” the following chapter will instead be focused on homeless drug addicts as complex moral subjects charged with their own form of ethical potential, a potential that – owing to their continual enmeshment in wider moral spheres – is both realised and curtailed by their engagement in certain bodily practices.

Chapter Five: Towards an Ethics of Escape

Addictive Ethics

The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate that the social realities of homelessness are pervaded by a particular constellation of ethical dimensions that are emergent in addictive pursuits. In this sense, social theories (such as this one) that concern themselves with the existential conditions of homeless addiction need to be readdressed to ensure that the analysis of these labile phenomena reflect the complexity of these dimensions. Echoing an exhortation made by Laidlaw (2013), this project takes as its imperative the effort to “take seriously” the forms of human life it claims to describe: ‘regarding them – and therefore describing them – as something we learn from as well as about’ (*ibid*:46). By thinking with these forms as well as simply about them, we enable knowledge to shape us as we shape it. The relational-demonic network developed in the previous two chapters constitutes a significant part of this imperative; a direct response to this need for a new conceptual apparatus with which *to think both about and with* the social complexities of homeless-addiction. Sure enough, this imperative demands certain questions: What forms does an ethical subject take? Through what configuration of relations might the ethical develop? What are some of the distinctive features of the ethical in homeless living? To what extent can drugs be understood as ethical resources? What are the limits of the ethical in this particular context?

I will approach these “intoxicated ethics” through the Michel Foucault’s “techniques of self-formation”:

‘[those techniques that] permit individuals to effect, by their own means, a certain number of operations on – their own bodies, their own souls, their own thoughts, their own conduct – and this in a manner so as to transform themselves, modify themselves, and to attain a certain state – of perfection, happiness, purity, supernatural power’ (1997:177, 255).

These processes of subjectivation are derived from the array of possibilities, themselves always historically contingent, that enable a subject to establish a relation with themselves. As such, these processes are at once active and reflective, occurring simultaneously at the level of thought and at the level of the body. Whilst these techniques undoubtedly enjoy a symbiotic relationship with the socio-cultural field of which the subject is irremovably a part, what ultimately separates them from other more banal actions is their capacity to partially transcend this same field. This idea hinges on the presupposition that the subject is always ensnared within a dynamic field of possibilities, where various and diverse forms of action remain readily available. According to Foucault, it is in bringing these forms of action to life that human beings simultaneously reveal and embody the complex interplay between power and freedom. Foucault's freedom,⁷³ in remaining an inseparable and ongoing part of a person's active self-formation, is grounded very much in the palpable reality of reflective thought.⁷⁴ The ability to step back, detach and then reflect on the conditions of existence – i.e. establishing a relation with oneself – is thus also what allows us to form relations with others. It is this double-headed step that 'constitutes the human being as an ethical subject' (1997:200).

How then, do the homeless addicts of *Itchy Park* establish relations with themselves? What part of their selves constitute the object of their thought and work? What then, is the "ethical substance" of their bodily projects? What measures does a person take to work on their ethical substance? What resources are available for this work, what techniques and platforms are readily to hand, and in what arrangements are such possibilities laid out, so that a subject might shape themselves? In asking these

⁷³ The exercising of freedom in social relations, as with the wielding of power, he suggests, involves constructing a possible field of interaction that brings persons into contact with others, to "orchestrate" their conduct. In this sense, freedom does not emerge in the zero-sum absence of power, but rather as a constitutive aspect of power relations themselves: 'power relations are possible only insofar as the subjects are free...If there are relations of power throughout every social field, it is because there is freedom everywhere' (1997:292).

⁷⁴ 'It is what allows one to step back from this way of acting or reacting, to present it to oneself as an object of thought and to question it as to its meaning, its conditions, and its goals. Thought is freedom in relation to what one does, the motion by which one detaches oneself from it, establishes it as an object, and reflects on it as a problem' (1997:117).

questions, we may find that ethical evaluation is often concerned with different parts of the self at different moments in time (Mahmood 2003). With these ideas in mind, I will therefore be using this chapter to explore the manifold ways in which the body establishes a relation with itself – with particular focus on the temporality of the flesh.

Building on Foucault's work, Faubion (2001b) extends this idea of ethical subjectivation, shining a light on the intrinsic complexity of what he terms the "ethical field." In his eyes, this field is constituted by continual interactions between ethical subjects, interactions that necessarily take place within established norms and discourses. As such, the ethical is at once about the failure and reproduction of these norms. Furthermore, this field of relations is mediated through what he calls the demand of *ethical regard*. In short, an ethical subject must be highly "regarding" of the practical and semiotic realities of their particular field, both in terms of reproducing it and contesting it. Thus to become an ethical subject requires continuous work, work that necessarily involves other, potentially conflictual subjects. Adopting Faubion's stance on the matter, this thesis argues that the "ethical subjectivity" for which the homeless take as their own responsibility is at least partially constituted by the "excess" of lost relationships. As such, the ethical "responsibility" to creatively work through and obviate the pain of loss by enacting a re-invention of self can be described as embodying a particular *telos* – the fundamental goal being to *escape* psychic pain and structural alienation via an alternative bodily form.

As a result of this ethical *telos*, the escapist shape-of-life fashioned by the homeless addicts of *Itchy Park* oftentimes requires doing things that cut against society's moral grain. Indeed, as Papadopoulos et al. (2008) argue in their discussion of the "imperceptible politics" of flight, escape is always grounded in concrete social fields, particularly those that constitute society's borderlands. According to the authors, these fields – at once ethical and social – are constituted by a "surplus" of sociality that necessarily escapes dominant forces of representation. It is from this excess of uncontainable social relations that the cultural politics of escape emerge. In this sense, escape is not oppositional to the regime of power from which it springs, rather it is a

creative movement that builds an entire new terrain for itself, thereby ‘forcing power to follow the line of escape and reconstitute itself’ (*ibid*:75). Like a never-ending game of cat and mouse, escape keeps finding ways to give sovereign power the slip (even if it can never truly get away). The slippery self-transformations enacted by the park’s addicts are the embodiment of this escapist imperative, forever betraying the regime of control by virtue of their highly public interruptions of the dominant bodily and temporal aesthetics. Nevertheless, this does not, as we shall see, prevent the regime from trying to capture and control these forms of escape, most notably through policing and medicalisation. The homeless addict’s socio-ethical field is constituted by this ongoing contradiction between established norms and alternative terrains-of-being, insofar as their own practices of bodily escape are interrupted by biopower on an almost daily basis. The result is that their moments of creative dissociation are continually shoehorned into representational categories that render them either diseased, insane, or criminal; or potentially a combination of all three.

From this perspective, narcotic escapism is not akin to a solipsistic descent into the inner world of the sub-conscious, rather it is a political and ethical practice through which human beings wriggle out from and transcend normative representations and discourses, reinventing themselves by intimately participating in and altering the conditions of their material and bodily existence. Accordingly, this chapter is concerned with exploring the ways in which the homeless – despite being under constant pressure from policing and representation – find ways to transform and go beyond themselves. So, if escape is to be understood as an integral aspect of the homeless subject’s ethical domain, the anaesthetic power of drugs must also belong somewhere within this particular field. Viewed from this perspective, drug consumption need not, for once, be dragged under biopower’s moral microscope, as an object at once ripe for cure and punishment, but rather can be seen as constituting part of the field of relations that form a person’s ethical regard.

At this point I would invite us to recall Desjarlais’ assertion, first relayed in the introductory chapter, that for the homeless, the body is often *the only instrument for*

acting on the world. This declaration, distinctly Maussian in character, has since been significantly fattened up, with the blacked-out body at the epicentre of my foregoing theoretical frameworks. In this sense, the “techniques of self-formation” laid down by Foucault cannot be seen as independent from the “techniques of the body” that have hitherto been at the forefront of my analysis. In what follows, I intend to reinforce the idea that they are in fact intimately intertwined, forever colliding to form what I will come to define as an “ethics of escape.”

With these ideas in mind, some further qualification as to why I have chosen the Foucauldian route as my primary analytic into the ethics of intoxication will be beneficial, insofar as it will allow me to situate my argument within what is currently a highly charged conversation within contemporary anthropology. Ultimately, in adopting the Foucauldian perspective, I find myself wading into the one of the more heated debates on the subject, that between Jarrett Zigon and James Laidlaw. For Zigon (2007), the ethical, seen as a kind of conscious choice or imperative, emerges in moments of what he calls “moral breakdown,” the idea being that ethical reflection is required in these moments in order to find alternative means of dwelling “comfortably” within the world – a world that is always already in the throes of relationality and contingency. Laidlaw (2013) takes particular issue with Zigon’s ethical *telos*, critiquing his vision of embodied “comfort” as a misguided rearticulation of Bourdieu’s habitus, arguing instead – via his research on Jainism – that moral life does not have a universally “comfortable quality.” Whilst I am in accordance with Laidlaw that moral life is oftentimes constituted as much by contradiction as it is by contentment, I am not so convinced by his evaluation of Zigon’s ethical framework.

The problem, I think, lies with Laidlaw’s reading of Zigonean “comfort” as a kind of “homeostatic” feedback mechanism. In drawing this anatomical analogy and purposefully biologising his notion of comfort, Laidlaw levies the dog-whistle charge of functionalism at Zigon’s model, effectively lodging it below the threshold of conscious action, and in the process severing it from its intimate attachment to the Heideggerian concept of *dwelling*. Constituted by *sparing* and *preserving* (Diprose 2012), to dwell is

to place oneself in a certain relationship with existence, to find a space that can be one's own, where wounds can be licked and repair can be sought, however briefly. In this sense, Zigon's comfort is not analogous to homeostatic regulation, but rather about the ongoing search for a kind of existential continuity in the face of varying degrees of rupture. Furthermore, the comfort sought through these ethical imperatives is not the warm blanket and cocoa variety, but rather it concerns the diverse attempts by people to make sense of a complex world that exists in a state of perpetual flux. In this sense, dwelling (comfortably) is just as much a means as it is an end.

Approached as a fundamental and *ongoing* human activity, rather than an "unreflective" end in itself, Zigon's concept of dwelling has much to offer. Indeed, having thus far framed the homeless-addicted situation as a kind of continual break(ing)down, the connections with his model are clear. Indeed, the need for dwelling – both materially and existentially – is never more keenly felt than by those experiencing the tragic realities of homelessness. However, under these abject conditions, the demand for comfort far outstrips its supply, and even on those occasions where it is briefly met, the very techniques of dwelling thus enacted can quickly become a crisis unto themselves. By virtue of their ongoing breakdown, *Itchy Park's* homeless have therefore found themselves caught up in a "new (ab)normal" reality that demands certain ethical self-operations over others; operations that, as I shall demonstrate, are simultaneously abjectifying and emancipating. Ultimately I am going to explore the homeless-addicted situation as a space of contradictory moral demand, in which by spinning their ethical wheels through drugs the residents of *Itchy Park* find traction, flight and trauma at the same time (though rarely in equal measure). Furthermore, aligning the Foucauldian treatment of ethics with Zigon's "situational" version of dwelling will allow the narcotic techniques of self and body expounded within this thesis to be conceptualised as an ongoing part of a person's ethical and relational attunement, becoming more or less acute as that person flows from life-event to life-event.

Before exploring more intimately what forms these ethical techniques might take, it is first paramount that we have available a deeper understanding of the dynamic politico-

moral fabric that constitutes the shared conditions of homeless addiction. As with the preceding chapters, I have taken an existential approach in trying to explore the moral possibilities that underpin everyday life on the streets. Given that the manifest experiences that constitute homeless addiction invariably infringe upon the highly politicised arena that is “Public Space” – whatever ethical operations⁷⁵ develop within the assembled situation of homelessness will unalterably clash with what Foucault calls the dominant “moral codes” laid down by traditional institutions of power and governance, embodied at street level by the police and their infinitely more despised “plastic” counterparts, Alcohol Enforcement Officers. To demonstrate how divergent moral discourses and temperaments co-exist in the same situation or location, I will offer a description of my own personal run-in with the “plastic coppers” that regularly patrol *Itchy Park*, embedding my own experience within broader constellations of the ethical and the operations of escape that arise as a result.

Messy Morals

It is mid-afternoon on Friday in *Itchy Park*. The sun is making a rare appearance in a summer that has started to feel ironic even by British standards. Given the agreeable conditions, the benches are fuller than usual for the time of day, with more than a few people forced to sit on the floor. The mood is calm and low-key, the various hangovers among the group being gradually nursed out of existence by the gentle hissing of fresh cans. Pressures build up and relieve themselves all around me. It feels like sitting amongst a cacophony of steam-valves, their intermittent sibilations betraying a space that seeks an equalisation it can never truly find. I have an appointment later in the afternoon that obliges me to wear a collared shirt, denying me the camouflagic qualities that my normal fashion sense tends to provide me in such circumstances. About twenty

⁷⁵ Ethics - that existential sweet-spot between techniques of the self and embodied projects of self-construction - are understandably identified with the moral domain. As Laidlaw puts it: ‘Any form of moral life has both these dimensions to it. But although thus intimately related and in practice inseparable, moral codes and ethics must be distinguished analytically, because they may change independently’ (2013:111). In this sense, moral codes and ethical projects act simultaneously in any form of life, although their relative proportionality will be contingent on the typically labile swells of history, society and politics that make up a given place in time.

meters from the benches are two people, sitting on their haunches, gesturing in our general direction. Before I know it, one of them is right in front of me, ID badge out. After introducing himself as an employee of Tower Hamlets Borough Council (THBC), he asks me if he could have a moment of my time, somewhere away from the benches. After looking briefly from side to side and realising that my drinking companions were either muttering disgruntlement under their breath, or else ignoring the man completely, and with my curiosity well and truly peaked, I dutifully acquiesce:

THBC1: We've asked to speak to you in private so that the group of people, those drinkers over there, can't hear what we're talking about.

JB: And what exactly are we talking about?

THBC1: We're about to call in assistance from the Tower Hamlets Alcohol Enforcement Officers so that they can raid this group. We were getting ourselves ready and noticed your shirt etcetera and said that he surely couldn't be with them, that he looked way too *normal*. So we thought we'd get you away from the group so you don't get caught up in it all when the officers arrive.

JB: Well, the thing is I very much *am* with them. I'm doing ethnographic research on homeless addiction and this is my primary research site.

THBC1: Research site? What kind of research? With them?

JB: Yep, with that lot over there. I've been hanging out with them for about nine months now. They're the informants for my PhD research. So why are you calling in a police raid?

THBC2: We've had reports from residents, about potentially anti-social behaviour; drinking in public, shouting, swearing, that kind of thing. The hotel across the road lost an important client recently, the fact of the matter is, when we get complaints, we have to react.

JB [pointing to picturesque white middle class couple sharing a bottle of rosé and what looks to be carrot sticks and hummus]: Drinking in public? Like those two over there?

THBC2: Well, not quite, that's different, they're not causing any trouble. No-one has lodged a complaint against them.

THBC1: They're not what we define as problem drinkers.

JB: With all due respect, none of this group's behaviour is even close to the kind of problems you get outside of nightclubs at closing time just up the road on Brick Lane. It just feels like they're getting somewhat singled out because of what they appear to be, rather than what they're actually doing. Also, this group has a lot of transient people moving through it, so there's no guarantee that whoever was being complained about is even around. You're essentially tarring them all with the same brush. I mean, let's face it, you dragged me out of their midst because my shirt made me look normal.

THBC1: What would you have us do?

JB: Don't call in a "raid," just let these guys get on with their day. I'll speak to them and voice the concerns you've shared with me. They're all decent people, they're just having a hard time of it. Sicking the authorities on them is only going to make their situation worse, it'll create a problem out of nothing. It's like punishing them just for existing.

THBC1: I'll tell you what, seeing as you're here and you've got them under control we'll be on our merry way.

JB: I'm definitely not in any way in control of them. I am, however, confident that these guys aren't going to be violent and cause any real "problems." At the end of the day this is the only place where they feel even remotely at home. The reality is that drinking is part of that. Send police down here and they'll just disperse for a bit, go to another part of your borough and return the moment the dust settles.

Once THBC1 and THBC2 were satisfied with the panoptic supervisory powers of my "normal" shirt, they did indeed go on their merry way. On returning to the benches, everyone tuned in to find out what had been going on between myself and the council officers. After filling them in, the conversation turns to the punitive measures imposed upon them for their way of life, and in particular how these policing measures are felt as a kind of constant harassment bordering on cultural sadism. It became clear that the homeless drinkers of *Itchy Park* were caught in the middle of a matrix of interdigitating power relations, the result of which being that certain "values" were deemed to be more socio-culturally legitimate than others. Take my observation about the young couple

sharing a bottle of wine in the park, they were deemed by the authorities as “non-problem” drinkers. Although half a bottle of wine at 13-15% ABV comes in at roughly the same chemical potency as a 568ml can of 9% lager, it is the homeless who are infinitely more likely to be ambushed by a mid-afternoon summer raid by the authorities, such is their repulsiveness to the dominant aesthetic sensibilities. Think about how the council officers went out of their way to pluck me out of the group, singling out my shirt as an obvious sign that I was too “normal” to be deliberately immersed within a bunch of “problem” drinkers; keen for my untroublesome, unproblematic, *normal* self to be saved from the indignation of being involved in the fallout when the plastics arrived. On hearing about my identification as “normal” Larry leans in and offers this by means of analysis:

‘We all make our own normal. You can’t read this shit out of a book. You can’t understand how our lives work until you’re actually in it. These fucking people, these textbook people who think they really know who I am because they read a chapter in a fucking book. They know fuck all.’

Taking his lead from Larry, and clearly riled up by the threat of a plastic ambush, Danny, a long term “problem” drinker had this to say on the matter:

‘These fucking plastic coppers, they’re trying to take away my cultural heritage, fucking Nazis. Our forefathers have been drinking alcohol in public for thousands of years. It’s sharia law through the back door. I’m telling you, if they try to take away my culture I’ll fucking destroy them. It’s cultural imperialism, I’m telling you.’

Acutely aware of their position outside the normative, the drinkers and drug-takers of *Itchy Park* are forced to measure their escapist conduct against a value system that demarcates their everyday existence as deviant and immoral. In this sense the Law, inseparable from the punitive sanctions it seeks to impose upon the homeless addict on an almost daily basis, has taken ownership over questions of what counts as “the good life,” reifying certain forms of conduct as “virtues” – self-control, economic

productivity,⁷⁶ normal clothes, public sobriety – whilst condemning other forms as sinful and corrupt. Indeed, for the anthropologist to blindly collapse Law, with its historical dependency on traditional moral philosophy, into morality would be tantamount to committing a ‘disciplinary mortal sin’ (Zigon 2014:17).

When Larry talks of the arrogance and impotency of the “textbook” approach to their particular form of human life, he reminds us that the hard-wired assumptions of Aristotelian-based natural law invariably struggle to confront the multiplex, fractured and oftentimes contradictory moral milieus that unfolds across any given social space – in his words, *they know fuck all*. And yet the fact is that every day the interpretation and embodiment of the natural law turns abstract philosophy into exigent social realities.

Making a similar claim in her study of homosexuality in Russia, Essig (1999) notes how juridical power structures are prone to produce the very subjects they come to represent. In Russia, the Law has historically been a generative source of queerness, a repressive producer of homosexuality that “doubled” the subject, as ‘subjected to and subject before’ – thereby nurturing queer identity and queer anxieties in equal measure (*ibid*:23). Likewise, for the homeless addicts of this thesis, the Law sets the boundaries for the protean flux of their own ethical self-modifications. To understand how moral worlds collide in this manner, we need to a more a nuanced and malleable set of theoretical tools with which to explore the messy boundaries between ethics and morality amongst the homeless of *Itchy Park*. The vignettes that follow will be an indispensable part of this tool-set, providing the ethnographic framework through which I will ultimately bring the ethical into intimate contact with *the abject*.

Keeping these ideas close to hand, it is worth recalling some of the core ideas from the previous chapters, namely that the homeless (like everybody else) are forever entangled within an ever-shifting web of relationships, some human, some non-human, some

⁷⁶ Recall here the complaint made to Tower Hamlets Council by the hotelier who missed out on revenue due to the “loss” of an important client. As a productive member of the late-liberal (moral) economy, the hotelier’s complaint regarding the social deviance across the park carries with it an implicit value that the homeless addict simply cannot expect to compete with – so dislocated is he from the temporal, economic and political frameworks that sustain this kind of moral claim; where loss of revenue is tantamount to loss of self.

present, some absent. Amongst the addicts of *Itchy Park*, more often than not a person's most dominant relationship is with their drug(s) of choice. This relationship – between subject and substance – is, by definition, about as embodied as relationships get. In this sense, drugs can be said to constitute a fundamental layer in the complex fabric of their moral and ethical universe. Recall that these layers are socially constituted by the “moral economy of sharing,” an idea first explored in the opening chapter. Without wanting to repeat what has already been said, the key point to remember is that the moral “community” of *Itchy Park* is built on the dual pillars of drugs and loss, foundations that are intrinsically unstable. As such, the *Itchy Park* community can be said to exist in a constant state of rupture.

Nevertheless, as Erving Goffman (1968:303) succinctly puts it: ‘A community is a community. Just as it is bizarre to those not in it, so it is natural, even if unwanted, to those who live it from within.’ As a diverse and ever-changing assemblage of precarious relationships/associations, their moral world is inextricably multi-dimensional, a dynamic and yet precarious network in which relations form and re-form as quickly as they unravel. In this sense, a moral assemblage such as the one described here is not defined by its clarity or even its buoyancy above other forms of social practice, but rather they are entangled within the messy flow of (anti)social life from which they are generated. In the wake of these ideas, certain key questions emerge: How is this precarious community made? What keeps it from falling apart?

In coming face to face with the cruelty and desolation of homelessness, it is oftentimes hard to look beyond the visceral reality of their existence. However, it is important to remember that myopically gazing at the physicality of life on the streets can rapidly obscure the fuller meaning of what constitutes the moral boundaries of the community. Hidden beneath the “self-serving” scarcity of park life is a complex ethics of care that is built around the omnipresent threat of withdrawal (not to mention the promise of escape). The best way to guard against the threat of withdrawal is to cultivate a generous persona, so long as this persona is backed up by a long-term history of reciprocal sharing within the community itself. However, due to the material scarcity of their life

conditions, gift-giving – be it in terms of drugs or money – is as much a site of inter-personal conflict as it is compassion. As such, the scale and patterns of “moral” sharing between the park’s residents are constituted by the rhythm of long-term interactions, interactions that are not always charitable. In this sense, the moral economy of sharing in *Itchy Park* reads like a real-life version of Prisoner’s Dilemma, with withdrawal acting as both the sentence and the jail-cell. With these ideas in place, I will now offer up two opposing ethnographic examples to flush out the way in which human-human relations and drug-human relations overlap to form the moral economy of sharing.

Becoming Antisocial: Morality in the Gray Zone

One afternoon, Max is collared by Miss Violet, who, hysterically sobbing, tells him that she is “clucking” from heroin withdrawal, begging him to give her some methadone. Max refuses outright, telling me afterwards that Miss Violet is *‘a user, the kind of person that just takes and takes and never gives anything back. A fucking waste of space.’* His neglect of her needs is reflective of a relationship that is based on mutual distrust and indifference. As such, his refusal to “sort her out” can be considered as an attuned moral temperament. Compare this to when Max sees Jasper, a man he has known for over two decades, slumped in the corner of a path, bent double and shaking from missing his methadone prescription. On seeing him in this state, Max rushes over, cradling Jasper the way one might a helpless infant, taking a small green vial from his pocket and pouring out a large cap of methadone. In a motion that is reminiscent of good Samaritan raising water to the mouth of a man dying of thirst, he takes Jasper’s head and brings the cap to his lips, encouraging him to drink whilst soothing him with gentle assurances, telling him *‘that everything will be fine when the meth hits. You’ll be okay. Just hang in there.’* To neglect Jasper, with whom he has a long-standing relationship based on the shared conditions of homeless addiction, would be to put their relationship at risk of deterioration, along with the prospect of future reciprocity. As Max says of that incident: *‘The things is I’ve been there. Too many times I’ve been there. I’ve been through the clucking, I know what it’s like, the pain, your bones aching, the stomach cramps, the diarrhoea. If I see a friend going through that and I can help,*

I've got to do it man. It's the right thing to do.' In this situation, giving away his methadone (itself a criminal offence, even if given to another user) and thus plying another human being with a drug, a powerful opiate no less, must surely be recognised as ethical imperative taken to maintain an ongoing relationship. This imperative operates through a particular moral economy, whereby "sorting out" a friend and "doing the right thing" means feeding his escape route, a decision that is based on the mutual knowledge that proliferates through the shared conditions of existence that underwrite the situation of homeless addiction.

Pooling money together, exchanging and demanding resources, aggressive or heroic displays of generosity, public castigations. As Bourgois and Schonberg (2009) noted in their work with San Francisco's homeless heroin users, these kind of practices are not just a logistical necessity, but 'the basis for sociality, [establishing] the boundaries of networks that provide companionship and also facilitate material survival' (*ibid*:82). Echoing their analysis, it is important to understand that the moral economy of sharing is itself constituted by the lumpenising and abusive dynamics of life below the poverty line, a space that Primo Levi (1988) called "the Gray Zone." Levi used this idea of the Gray Zone to encompass the ethical nightmare that the inmates of Nazi concentration camps were forced to endure. In the Gray Zone, the struggle for survival overwhelms human decency as inmates are forced to fight amongst themselves for tiny advantages in the camp hierarchy, to cling to life just a little bit longer. The camps were engineered in such a way that the inmates had no choice but to brutalise each other, to reproduce in everyday living the barbaric cruelty of laid down by their captors. For Levi, the Gray Zone did not disappear when the walls of the camp finally crumbled, rather it took on new forms, re-emerging in the shadowy peripheries of modern life.

So, whilst the moral economy undoubtedly demands of its participants regular displays of generosity and ongoing reciprocity, the logic of the Gray Zone ensures that no good deed goes unpunished; insofar as behind every act of kindness lays the potential for duplicity and predatory opportunism. With their lives in perpetual crisis – where every

day is “terror as usual”⁷⁷ – the need to help others is continuously set against oftentimes brutal cost-benefit analyses that can never leave everyone satisfied. For every full vein and can, there are always empty ones around the corner. For every person who gets sorted out, another goes begging. This messy flow of interpersonal violence and mutual betrayal is arguably at its most chaotic when the ethical self-operations that constitute life on the street collide with the hegemonic custodians of the dominant/traditional moral order – i.e. the police (Ranci re 1998). Indeed, the homeless of *Itchy Park* represent but one tiny fragment along a continuum of ever-growing violence, themselves surpassed by an ever-growing percentage of the global population who, ever since the explosion of late liberal policy-making that began in the early 1980s, have been socially, politically and economically marginalised by the monstrous spectre of US-inspired hypercapitalism. In short, services for vulnerable groups have been disembowelled in favour of a punitive system of governance that has placed evermore emphasis on police intervention and judicial sanctions whilst simultaneously promoting economic inequality through the gradual divestment of power to financial technocrats. Indeed, Ranci re (2004) even goes so far as to argue that policing has become a substitute for politics, a state-sponsored means of blocking the escapist capacity of people to imagine and reinvent themselves otherwise. Picking things up after my encounter with the two Tower Hamlets officers, I will now be offering up a vignette that captures this kind of punitive system in action.

Having negotiated a cease-fire with Tower Hamlets over their threat of a police raid, whatever sort of mild optimism we were enjoying thereafter was short-lived when the most despised of all the “plastic coppers” turned up some time towards the early evening. Affectionately nicknamed *SS John* due to his neo-fascistic zeal for both confiscating alcohol and handing out crippling fines, the officer, after greeting everyone with a special kind of contempt, makes anyone with an open can “surrender” it to him so that he can empty it out onto the floor. He assures everyone involved that any refusal to comply will be met with a £500 fine. Curious, I asked SS John if he felt that his way of doing things was maybe causing more harm than good:

⁷⁷ See Taussig (1989).

SS John: If I feel that someone is going to be antisocial, I'll take away their alcohol. I've been working in this area for seven years and our methods are extremely effective.

JB: Surely given that the numbers of homeless and indeed addicts are rising every year you're fighting a losing battle?

SS John: I'm not losing. I'm winning.

Jimmy [hovering in the background]: Is that what this is for you, you own personal mission to win a fucking gold medal?

At this point, SS John asks me if he can turn off his camera/recording equipment for the next part of our conversation.

SS John: You don't know these people. You may think that you know them, but the only reason they're even talking to you is because they want something. The moment they can they'll rob you. These people will take everything from you. They're different. This group are all violent and aggressive. They damage the community with their drinking. If there's a couple in the park having a bottle of wine and having a nice time, that's fine. But these lot are different. The moment they have a drink down them, they become uncontrollable. The one I took the beer off earlier, the moment he finishes that second can, he'll be gone. You can see it in his eyes, glazing over. These people have hostels, if they want to drink that desperately they can do it in there. We offer support, we try and put them in touch with the right services, but these people refuse. They don't want the support.

Jimmy chimes in: *Support!? When have you ever been in this position? When have you ever tried to access these support services you speak of. Ever since I've been on the street the only support I had was from myself.*

JB: What about people who don't have homes?

SS John: Who doesn't have a home?

JB:the homeless?

SS John: If I see a homeless person on his own, in the streets with a can, I'll take it off him straight away.

JB: Because you deem him to be anti-social?

SS John: If someone is on the street drinking I believe that person will commit ASB [anti-social behaviour] in the future. If you want to help these people, stop them from coming into the park.

After shooting me perhaps the most insincere smile I've ever received, SS John takes his leave. The reality is that the homeless will rarely, if ever, confront and challenge authority figures such as SS John. Even when they get slapped with a hefty fine, the vast majority feel unable to take on the stress of the appeals process, forced yet again to become passive bystanders to the unjust realities of their own existence. Consider these words from Dave:

'Like I told you, the homeless are commodities. Every few months, we go through something we call "the purge." The police and some puppets from the local council come out in their drones and issue ASBOs to anyone they can find. I got one last night for being "drunk and urinating in public." I don't even drink anymore, and I certainly wasn't urinating. I have been starting the appeals process but I've been advised not to pursue it, because they'll just change the charge by using vagrancy laws against me. You know why they do it? Because any fines we incur get taken straight out of our ESA (Employment and Support Allowance). Eighty-five fucking quid, taken from a homeless person to put money back in police and council coffers. It's a fucked-up world.'

Dave's testimony reveals how in *Itchy Park*, the fear of arrest, sanction, confiscation and dispersal perpetually haunted the corner's residents. Furthermore, the interference in their daily lives at the hands of the authorities often produced long-term damage for the homeless, be it economically through fining or judicially through incarceration. Not only that, the harsh and oftentimes capricious nature of this policing reinforced the "lumpen" subjectivity of the homeless by further sanctioning and humiliating them.

SS John returns about half an hour after our previous encounter. Noticing him come into the park, Tony tells me to hide my beer, lest I am forced to surrender it on his arrival.

Although my beer is practically already finished, I make no attempt to hide it, reasoning that if I am deemed to be “normal,” then surely I am within my rights to enjoy a beer in public. SS John had other ideas:

SS John: Sir, I need you to surrender the alcohol.

JB: But you said earlier that you only confiscate alcohol if you believe that person is going to act in an antisocial manner?

SS John: Yes, and I believe that you will show antisocial behaviour if you consume alcohol. If you do not surrender your alcohol, I will have you arrested and you will go before a magistrate’s court. Are you refusing to surrender your alcohol?

JB: Are you saying I’m antisocial?

SS John: Yes, you are antisocial. I believe that you are part of this group and that you are acting in an antisocial way. I believe that you now have influence over this group.

JB: I’d rather not surrender, actually.

SS John: Come over here sir, and bring your alcohol with you please. Will you surrender? If you do not comply I will be calling the police.

JB: Then I suggest you call the police

SS John [talking into his radio]: I need back up to deal with an antisocial individual. Give me your details.

JB: There’s no way I’m giving you my details so I really wouldn’t bother asking again.

SS John: Those are one of our powers.

JB [taking one final swig and putting the can in the bin]: Look, my beer is actually already finished, so I’m not going to litter.

SS John: I’m not sure what you’re trying to prove by making things difficult for me in front these people.

JB: I’m not trying to prove a point, I’m trying to understand how these people go about their lives and understanding their relationship with you is part of that.

Clearly exasperated by the situation, SS John gives up calling for backup. Turning his attention instead to the rest of the group, he starts taking names for being “verbally assaulted,” gripping his notepad like a cocked pistol. By this point Jimmy has gotten

extremely wound up, telling him *'you prey on the weak, the vulnerable. Prey on the weak. Treat us like we're the scum of the earth, like we don't have the right to exist. If you take a can away from a homeless man and he needs that can to survive and he ends up doing something that kills him, could you sleep at night, with that on your conscience?'* What was previously a quiet group of homeless people getting through their day had become a volatile space of conflicting ethico-moral values, infinitely more "antisocial" than the original situation that SS John was so hell-bent on pre-empting. In demanding myself and the others to "surrender" our alcohol, SS John was using the law to make us yield to what he viewed as a socially acceptable form of public conduct, in doing so restoring⁷⁸ the dominant moral values that that State wishes to impose on prime urban space. Indeed, the same behaviour that SS John sees as antisocial – i.e. a homeless person drinking a can on the street – Jimmy sees as a matter of life and death: *'he needs that can to survive.'*

As I have already alluded to in previous sections, the nexus of socio-narcotic relationships that constitute the moral fabric of homeless addiction form the gutter to the increasingly thin roof of British statehood. As more and more holes appear in this roof these liminal spaces of abandonment will determine the life conditions for an increasing number of economically marginal people who struggle to keep a foothold on the whirling carousel of modern hypercapitalism. As if being in the gutter isn't bad enough, these same people are forced to live under a form of stupefying moral dictatorship that effectively reduces a person's escapist ethics to criminality. As Max says, *'he's the worst one. He talks to us like we're children, makes no attempt to actually talk about the situation. Just tries to punish us. If there are people being aggressive for sure, arrest them, take them away. But don't tar us all with the same brush. We're just trying to survive and get through the day.'*

For a homeless addict, getting through the day is ontologically bound up with the risky pursuit of transcending the indifference of the world that greets them each morning. In this most totalitarian of senses, the laws imposed them by overzealous local councils

⁷⁸ Surrender and restore share a common etymology, from the Latin *reddere*.

are, quite literally, impossible to obey. Their public consumption of intoxicants is an irremovable part of their adaptive response to the traumatic conditions of their own socio-political marginalisation. Punitive sanctions handed down by plastic fascists will do nothing to “stop” their behaviour, it will merely make their cage that little bit more brutalising, adding a little extra misery to what is already an existence in the midst of perpetual collapse.

After the incident with SS John, Jimmy stopped me as I was heading home, and, giving me a hearty slap on the back, commended me for tangling with the plastics, telling me ‘*you’re one of the boys now! Antisocial Josh!*’ I replied with the assurance that I would wear the label like a badge of honour. And even though I meant every word, it was undeniable that my “becoming antisocial” emerged from a wholly different trajectory to that of Jimmy or any other members of the group. Where my antisociality emerged through the engrossing performance of ethnographic risk, for the addicts of *Itchy Park*, “becoming antisocial” was an inevitable part of their own ongoing tragedy. In the section that follows, I will continue to explore the tragic trajectories of homeless addiction, approaching them as a kind of relational crisis or “crack.” In this sense, I will start to explore the ethical potential of the addicted body, intermittently adopting a Deleuzian lens so as to critically examine the potential and the limitations of these escapist techniques.

Knife and Wound

As I have thus far argued, homeless-addiction has far more to do with the embodied relational configurations of presences and absences (along with the temporalities that simultaneously accompany them) than it does with physical or psychic exposure. At the core of this model is the “tripled-up” form of the blacked-out body – itself a body socially destined to exist in a kind of perpetual, incomplete, and to some extent tormented, transition - *almost this, almost that*. Max acknowledges the centrality of the body in this process when he spoke in the previous chapters of ‘*building a cotton wool*

*cocoon*⁷⁹ around himself through drugs.’ Max mediated the psychic threat brought about by his sexual abuse, incarceration, and subsequent homelessness by creating protective concentric circles around himself, initially with self-harm, and then later with drugs.

Recall that for Max, drugs and self-harm both serve as a means of finding existential traction in an unstable and chaotic world, of using his body as an instrument of control in a world where precious little else remained sovereign.

For many of the homeless people I worked with, there appeared to be a deep and complex relationship between self-harm and drug-taking. The connection between the two, I think, hinges on the capacity of each to viscerally blur, disrupt and transfigure a person’s existential borders. Significantly, for Max, a long-term heroin addict, these border disruptions predominantly occur at the level of the skin – be it through the knife or the needle. As a permanent coating for the body, the skin acts as a psycho-somatic envelope that simultaneously buffers the space between inside and outside (Anzieu 1985; Berressem 1999; Pinney 2001, Turner 2012). As a transitional container, we can (both physically and metaphorically) conceptualise the skin as a semi-permeable membrane through which alterations of the self are constructed.

According to Anzieu, the skin can be thought of as a canvas upon which the “inner” psychic life of the self projects itself to the outside. What, though, if this traffic is not all one way? What if the skin is as much *introjective* as it is projective? In short, if the skin can be thought of not just in terms of the inner coming out, but simultaneously as *the outer coming in*, what might this reveal about someone like Max’s double-headed propensity for cutting/shooting up? As I have already suggested, addiction can be thought of primarily as *a matter of relation between surfaces*. In Max’s case, the blade and the heroin-laced needle are part of the same set of transformational techniques, an operation, taking place at the transitional level of the “skinfilm,” that works to mediate the existential crisis underwriting his tragic situation. In this sense, body, knife and

⁷⁹ Max’s “cocoon” isn’t the back-to-the-womb cocoon of Freudian thinking, rather it is a relational-temporal carapace that reflects and conditions his ontological realities.

needle⁸⁰ act simultaneously as instruments in the technico-ethical repertoire through which Max works on himself. In trying to reassert control, to “recover” himself and attend to the gaping absence of his intimate relationships, Max enacts an operation of self-care that echoes Sartre’s comments on Baudelaire’s masochistic quest to somehow completely possess himself, of his decision to ‘explore himself as the knife explores the wound’ (1965:25). Not unlike Baudelaire, and in a way that is distinctly ethical in the Foucauldian sense, in his capacity *to be at once knife and wound*, Max, like Sartre, captures the impulse to be simultaneously subject and object.

Through the border-disrupting practices of drugs and self-mutilation, Max transforms his body into an object of escape, an object that simultaneously constitutes his very being. Whilst Sartre’s metaphor seems especially pertinent with respect to Max’s choice to take blade to flesh, it is equally applicable, if not more, to his drug-taking because, if anything, the metamorphic power of narcotics, particularly in terms of existential border-disruption, will invariably outstrip the knife’s transformative potential. In a very real sense, by actively allowing the intrusion of blade and needle to transform his self-consciousness, so that the wounds they create on/in his body can serve as sites of escape unto themselves, Max finds a creative means to turn his abandoned self into an object of “ethical substance.” This body is not of the Cartesian variety, separate somehow from the body-mind he so dedicatedly warps on a daily basis. Rather it is closer to the grotesque body of Bakhtin’s thought, constituted by excess and Batailleian performances of waste, driven to simultaneously reflect and diffract the everyday perversions that constitute his own marginalised social existence. The drug and the knife, then, are both on the “cutting edge,” so to speak, of homeless ethical technology; profusely used as a means to transfigure the crisis-of-presence that marks the compound fracture of relational break(ing)down.

⁸⁰ Although the literal piercing of the skin in heroin injection appears almost tailor-made for this reading of Anzieu’s porous “skin-ego” – we can apply this idea of inside-outside border disruption to the body’s other more obvious apertures, most notably the gaping mouth – the other key narco-somatic border-crossing; what Bakhtin calls ‘the wide-open bodily abyss’ (1968:317).

Of course, unlike regular physical exercise or alternative dietary regimens, intoxicated bouts of self-mutilation such as those carried out by Max are *not* typically viewed as beneficial. Indeed, whilst they clearly constitute an operation on the self, it is not so immediately clear in what sense these operations are “ethical,” so to speak. Foucault’s work helps to clarify this problem, allowing us to take the ethical as constituted by particular forms of discursive practice, instantiated through certain technologies, techniques, and bodily procedures. Therefore, within a community founded on drug-bonding, socio-structural isolation, and intimate losses, an anthropological inquiry into the ethical need not reflect the “top down” codes of the dominant moral order, codes that would “naturally” represent instances of self-harm and drug taking as intrinsically unethical/immoral. On the contrary, what matters here is not so much whether people obey or disobey these moral codes, but the way in which people find ways to live amongst them (not to mention transcend them). In this sense, the ethical is about the relationships they construct between the constellation of elements that “fashion” the self. In Max’s case, whilst his bodily practices undeniably stand apart from the dominant moral order, this cutting and injecting of flesh nevertheless constitutes a deliberate act of self-fashioning, a kind of “work” performed on the self carried out in order to realise a particular modality-of-being – namely an escapist being. It is in line with this conception of the ethical that we can say that the needle and knife possess a radical, if undeniably flawed and dangerous, potential for taking care of the self.

According to Max, drugs and alcohol – through their simultaneous temporal distortion and dissociative embodiment – take him to a place beyond the pain and crisis of everyday life, where he *‘can finally be in control of [his] own body’* – control that has been systematically denied to him first by an abusive family member, then by the state through imprisonment, and most recently through the bureaucratic marginalisation of the Home Office. The irony, of course, is that Max actually acquires this sense of “control” precisely through its absence. Like the skydiver’s of Lyng’s (1990) ethnography, Max too reveals himself to be a “control freak” – paradoxically finding control in what is effectively uncontrollable. Where Lyng’s skydivers find creative spontaneity in skilfully negotiating the “edge” by throwing their bodies into nature’s

abyss (*controlling it*, as it were) the fact remains that a large portion of the intense embodied pleasure derived from “edgeworking” stems from the fact that much of this sense of control is in fact *illusory*. Likewise, for Max, this sense of control through drugs is similarly illusory, in that his deep yearning for existential and bodily control is in fact only realised at the moment that he escapes it – i.e. when he slips into the perspectival cocoon of the blacked-out body, where control is bestowed onto a demonic force of his own expersonation: *‘We’ve all got demons, here in the park, I’ve been fighting mine every single day. That’s just how life is when you’re in our position – you gotta deal with it somehow.’*

The anaesthesia sought by Max through his memory-obliterating binges is not to be confused with the passivity intrinsic to the surgical variety. In the operating theatre, the subject remains completely dependent on the clinician for maintaining and perpetuating his/her already dicey existence. Max’s blackouts, in contrast, are not passive. In this sense, Max is at once anaesthesiologist and patient – the living, breathing object of his own surgical incision. By beginning the operation himself, Max takes control of his body only to hand over the scalpel to *somebody else* at some point along the way. In order for him to “take control” of this operation-of-self, a kind of *active blindness* is necessary, a self-imposed scorching of the retinas, a regenerative destruction of the self – a transformation rather than a suppression of consciousness.

In reworking his past traumas and ongoing crisis-of-presence into the escapist form of drug-fuelled binges, Max is activating a creative pathway through which to reconfigure himself from a passive bystander (where the world continually acts on him) into a blind transformer of his own social destiny (where he acts transformatively on the world) – even if the timeframe of this blind metamorphosis begins with when a drug is ingested, and ends when its effects wear off. His drug-taking can thus be recognised as an ethical imperative because in doing so he is actively working, albeit through risky and morally-loaded mediums, to transfigure and care for the self by placing his bodymind into the warped temporal folds of blacked-out possession, experienced as a kind of uncanny dwelling that lies outside normative representations.

Checkmate

In many ways, the tragic compound fractures that catalyse the transition into homeless addiction (death, eviction, illness, abuse, loss) constitute a kind of social and political oblivion; an internecine field of relations (human and non-human) that, as has already been intimated, evokes Agamben's bare life – the wounded, expendable, and precarious remainder of an already debased citizenry (referred to as *bios*). We might say that bare life, as both the recipient and the effect of sovereign violence, is life in the midst of break(ing)down, divested of its political significance, of its intrinsic form of *being*. In this sense, these embodied operations of escape (understood here as particular kind of self-care) indulged in by Max and his contemporaries actively cut against the grain of institutionalised “moral codes,” creating something of a Batesonian “double-bind” - wherein the inimitable techniques of self that reflectively sustain the creative possibilities of (de)subjectivation become somehow ensnared within the totalising and objectifying structures of institutional power (referred to by Foucault as “political techniques”).

The criminalization of the drug-addict represents just such a political technique, through which the State – embodied by the “authoritarian word” of people like SS John – takes on the role of “protector” of unpolluted life, thus ensuring that the body remains in a “natural” state. In this way, questions of drug-taking become subsumed into questions of biopower, such that the addicted body itself becomes part of the exclusion that constitutes the political realm. As bare life, the homeless addict is always already arrested by the political in a double way: 1) through its exclusion from the *polis* – in this sense its *exclusion* constitutes its *inclusion*⁸¹ – and 2) through its unmediated exposure to violence, which does not itself constitute a crime. In uncovering the simultaneous link between biomedical determinism, addiction, and criminality we bear witness to the radical politicisation of bare life intimated in Agamben's analysis of the modern epoch.

⁸¹ In Agamben's words, the political takes form because man is simultaneously maintained “in relation to that bare life in an inclusive exclusion” (1998:12).

With the State as the new enactor of biopower, *bare life* is no longer excluded outside of the political field, becoming instead the core of *a new hidden norm*. Significantly, this exclusive inclusion does not mean that bare life becomes integrated with the political *bios*; rather it represents the abjectifying inclusion of an indigestible remainder, which remains the target of biopolitical violence. This disjunctive incorporation of the addict's bare life both into the political arena and into the structure of (anti)citizenship manifests itself most poignantly, I suggest, in the "moral torment"⁸² experienced by homeless addicts as they embark on embodied techniques of self-escape, knowing full well that the same operations will render them ever more exposed to sovereign violence.

Approached from this angle, we will begin to see how drug-fuelled transformations can be at once ethical and abjectifying.

For in using the body as an instrument of reflective care – *of exploring the wound with the knife*⁸³ – the very dimensions of homelessness that can be viewed as ethical simultaneously designate their space of social existence as somehow "unliveable," an abject zone that is nevertheless over-populated by those who no longer enjoy the status of "good citizen," and yet whose very existence under the banner of "unliveable" is necessary to delineate the territory of the good citizen. In this sense then, the good citizen is constituted by the dual forces of inclusive exclusion and abjection; a dark mirror 'which produces a constitutive outside to the subject, an abjected outside which is, after all "inside" as its own founding repudiation' (Butler 1993:3). In what follows, I am going to explore the ethical-abject in greater depth, ethnographically examining the ways in which this moral torment emerges, in particular how homeless addicts tend to intensify their own cast-outness through practices that are meant to ameliorate it. In this way, we will acquire a clearer picture as to both the limitations and potential that underwrite the ethics of escape.

⁸² A term I gratefully borrow from Joel Robbins (2004, 2007).

⁸³ Indeed, Elaine Scarry's (1985) work reminds us that the sensation of pain, especially in self-harm, is always a matter of somatic inscription, of transforming one's own body into a membrane that invites the world into its most intimate fissures.

Baby Dennis

Having been together on and off for almost twenty years, Trent and Lisa⁸⁴ have recently had their third child together. Both now in their late forties, their first child has long since grown up. Like its older sibling, baby Dennis will be placed in foster care. Their second child was lost in the latter stages of pregnancy when Lisa fell ill with a tuberculosis infection that was brought about by the continued use of intravenous drugs, predominantly heroin. Owing to her ongoing addiction during this third and latest pregnancy, Dennis narrowly avoided a similar fate to that of his unborn little brother. It is for this reason that Dennis, despite being several weeks old, is still deemed too weak to leave the neonatal ward. His father, Trent, has spent thirty-one of his forty-seven years behind bars, almost exclusively for drug-related offences. As he puts it: *'I'm either doing time or killing time.'* During those brief periods as a “free man” he has found himself either on the streets or in temporary accommodation around the Whitechapel area. Lisa, currently living in a hostel, has also spent a significant amount of time on the streets, pushed into prostitution for long periods of time throughout her life, especially when Trent finds himself locked up.

Lisa's very upbringing was saturated with drugs. Her mother met her father when he was dealing; setting the foundations for a way of life that very much stayed in the family. As she notes: *'It was part of the family until Dad eventually left, met another woman and got clean.'* Her mother and grandmother continued using heroin in the family home long after her father disappeared. To say that drugs formed part of the intimate relations that constituted the household would be an understatement. And yet even under those circumstances, a few years ago Lisa had tried to get clean, entering a rehabilitation facility and completing the course; a fact she remains immensely proud of. However, shortly after finishing the programme her family network began to fall apart. In the same twelve-month period her mother and grandmother both died in very sudden circumstances (her mother of an overdose), collapsing her entire support system in one foul swoop. The only long-term relationship that still remained was Trent and, of course,

⁸⁴ The same Lisa from the previous chapters.

those ready-made surrogates: crack, booze and heroin. As a couple, Lisa and Trent are as relationally entangled with their substances as they are with each other. As Ben, Lisa's former step-father says of them: *'It's a drug thing between them. They're so off their face the entire time, they wouldn't actually know what to say to each other if they were sober.'*

On the day that concerns this vignette, Trent is waiting for Lisa in the park so that they can go and officially register the child's name, a process that the mother needs to be present for. Having left this task to the last-minute, they risk incurring a hefty £200 fine if they fail to complete the registration today; money which neither of them have. This time constraint is felt even more keenly by Trent, who is awaiting sentencing for a drug-related bicycle theft that was carried out the previous year. He is actively avoiding attending court so that he can be present for the handover of his child into foster care. In almost comical fashion, he is dragging around a rucksack with all the possessions he needs to do a prison sentence in case he gets collared while he is out and about (including a large amount of synthetic cannabis stored somewhere in his rectum that will provide the initial capital for his entrepreneurial efforts behind bars). As more time passes, Trent starts to get increasingly anxious. After a while, a couple of local faces tell us that have just seen Lisa disappear with a known working girl and a punter with a famous proclivity for large amounts of crack cocaine – a particular favourite of Lisa's. It soon becomes clear that Lisa has gone to "smoke up" with her friend rather than go and complete her child's registration. Completing the registration is something of a big deal to Trent. As he puts it:

Until we register him as under my name, don't matter if the DNA test match up, until you put your signature down that baby isn't yours in the eyes of the law. It's the same thing your family name. It's my son, it carries my fucking family name. If a baby don't have your name, you ain't got no legal right to it. If I don't put my signature down, it's like I don't exist as a father.

Trent's fears over the legitimacy of his fatherhood are grounded in the overarching precarity of his situation. As a repeat offender and homeless drug addict, Trent's world is forever teetering on the brink of collapse: *'I can't even sign on in this country. My National Insurance number has never been used, I've got no passport, no birth certificate. I can't claim for anything. The only thing I've been known as is a prisoner in this country. It's like I don't exist!'* Trent's anxiety over the registration of his family name is tied into the wider existential uncertainties that underpin his current situation as an addict and a criminal. Furthermore, he is acutely aware that his current position severely inhibits his capacity to be an active presence in his child's life: *'I would love to be with my son now but while I'm on drugs I can't do that. I live in temporary housing, got no money, I'm not in the right situation to raise a child. But you had better believe that I'm gonna be there for when we hand my son over.'*

On a day when his partner has disappeared to smoke crack, when he could be arrested at any moment, completing his son's birth registration represents one of the few components of his world that remains controllable. Indeed, without Lisa present, he cannot even visit his son in the hospital. Bureaucratically legitimising his son through the inscription of the family name is not only a necessary means of suring up his existential, and legal, foundations – to remind himself that he *does exist* – it is also a means of working on his *ethical substance*, of situating himself in a specific and encompassing kin arrangement, of guaranteeing his “existence” as Dennis' father. Lisa's absence along with her decision to use drugs at this particular time threatens the integrity of Trent's ethical project of self-formation, placing his own relationship with Lisa under significant strain. As Trent puts it (high on crack himself):

'She's fucked off to smoke crack. I got the money together for us to register the baby. I can't even go and visit my own baby without her there. Between 2 and 4 everyday, that's when we can visit. The social worker is there waiting for us now, calling her phone, I can't pick that up, it's embarrassing, Yea the mother of my child is choosing drugs over the baby, that's what it looks like to me. She's gone with that girl Mia, she sucks cock, ten, fifteen quid a go. Lisa sets it up for them and gets a free smoke.'

Over the previous few weeks, Lisa had always swung by the park before and after a visit to the hospital, showing off new clothes and photographs, beaming with pride over what a “fighter” her little boy is and how *‘all the nurses have definitely picked him as their favourite.’* However, as the handover date approached in conjunction with Trent’s immanent sentencing, Lisa began to grow increasingly withdrawn. Having already lost two children, one from her care and the other from the world itself, it was clear that the impending removal of this, her newest and almost certainly last baby was starting to take a serious emotional and psychic toll. As she put it at the time: *‘He could literally be arrested at any point. I’ve been trying not to think about it to be honest – him or the baby. Just been getting off my head every day; booze, crack, H...whatever I can get my hands on really. I suppose that isn’t really the answer though is it?’*

Returning to the day of baby Dennis’ registration: Trent sits in the park, high on crack, swigging a beer, his rucksack stocked with the necessary essentials to facilitate a prison sentence that could begin at literally any moment, contemplating his own existence, his legal right to his child, and his future as a father. Lisa is somewhere around the corner, also smoking crack, working through her sense of abandonment and existential malaise. Next week there will be no more hospital visits, no more baby clothes to clean and show off, no more time spent on the ward as a family, fractured and unstable thought it may be. Her partner will be doing another stretch in prison for drug-related offences, meaning that she will have to up her time on the street corners, grafting to make ends meet. The only relationship left in her life at this point will be the bottle, the pipe and the needle, and their transcendent potency will most likely seem more important than ever. Her escapism through these substances will become a form of dwelling unto itself, capricious, costly and implosive without doubt; but it will remain her most effective and creative means of papering over the collapse of her most intimate relationships. As such, it is in keeping with the world on-her-own-terms that we can describe her drug consumption as an existential and ethical project, in that “getting off” her head both takes her beyond the harsh realities of homelessness and sex-work whilst also providing

a relational surrogate for those two other beings who remain absent and dislocated from the world she irremovably finds herself in.

Moral Torment: Cracking Tragic

Notwithstanding the fact that taking drugs enabled Lisa to transcend the pain of her situation, the ethical potential of patching up a collapsing world through anaesthetic intoxicants incurs some serious social and existential costs. In Max's terms, she has done her best to craft a "new time" (and also a new body) for herself, one that extricates her from the burden of her own presence, forging a costly and precarious relational carapace with an illicit drug which, through the embodied suspension of time, offers her an allochronic reprieve from the seemingly relentless brutalities that constitute her everyday life. The irony though (one that Trent recognises when he points out that his addiction means he is not in a position to be a "real" father) is that the allochronic reprieve brought about by drugs is a rupture unto itself, a fragmentation of sense and self that worms its way imperceptibly into the body, becoming an inextricable component of the incarnate tragedies that dwell in the depths of the addicted self – referred to by Deleuze as *the crack*. In what follows, I will use the analytic framework provided by Deleuze to explore the ethical-abjection of Lisa's intoxicated "cracking"; to demonstrate how narcotic alterity offers up promise and peril in equal measure, a nexus of transcendent connections and irreparable damage.

Lisa never did turn up to meet Trent that afternoon, eventually registering her baby on her own with the help of a social worker. Even though Dennis was registered with his father's surname, Trent was unable to attend either the registration or the foster care handover, the law catching up with him within a couple of days of our meeting in the park. A week or so after Trent's incarceration, with baby Dennis since transferred into a foster home, Lisa comes into the park, her forearm all wrapped in bandages, the fabric roseate with the stanced diffusion of claret.

'I've been out of my head for a few days now, don't even know what day it is. I must have got a blade at some point, self-harm. Don't really remember much of it to be honest, just flashes. They tried to section me. Thought I must be mad, telling me I'm going through psychosis or something. Telling me my using and that is all about my mother. Those councillors, they want to put you in a box. But it's not like that. Life is more complicated than that, you know what I mean?'

Aside from the blood-soaked bandages, in Lisa's left pocket is a single wooden chopstick, the key use of which is not exactly nutritional, rather it turns out that the thin end of said instrument is more or less the optimal surface area for pushing rocks into a crack-pipe. For Lisa, a simultaneous part of getting out/off her head is the stepping out of time, an idea she herself asserts when talking of her extreme temporal disorientation in the wake of her latest drug-binge. Furthermore, we might recall from chapter three that Lisa is no stranger to self-harm. We might also recall that, like Max, Lisa framed her self-harm in terms of *taking some kind of control* – a bodily technique that arose in the wake of her first major relational trauma, i.e. the death of her partner and his re-emergence through a visceral string of phantasmic hauntings. Fast forward to the present day – newborn son in foster care, partner in prison – and the entanglement between relational trauma, memory-obliterating intoxication and self-mutilation remains as intimate as it ever was, if not more so. In getting out/off her head Lisa has, like Max, transformed her body into an instrument of self-escape, an amnesiac blur of flashes and slashes, *losing control to take control*. Caught out in the open, chemically disjoined from her body and from time, and “discovered” by the powers-that-be on some park bench cutting her forearms to ribbons, Lisa found herself, not for the first time, on the brink of institutionalisation.

In this moment, we are again made witness to the way in which the addict's bare life (and the embodied techniques of self-escape that underwrite it) is made a target of disciplinary biopower. In this case, the existential and political significance of Lisa's intoxicated self-harming is effectively suspended, reduced to a form of madness, a form of life that can be locked away – sectioned – with relative impunity. Significantly

though, Lisa ultimately rejects this kind of totalising ideology, keen to assert that life's intrinsic complexity makes putting people into discrete boxes tantamount to a great futility, a short-sightedness that spectacularly overlooks the contingency of a given situation. And yet despite her eloquent repudiations of these essentialising claims, Lisa is also acutely aware that the very institutional structures that render her inner world an embryonic hive of madness and deviance are the same ones that will ultimately decide the social fate of her newborn child. Their mercy is contingent on her "getting clean," of completely extricating herself from the very embodied techniques of self-escape that allow her to get through the day. Force into this checkmate situation, Lisa finds herself living in a world where the very fabric of her assembled selfhood – and the relations that underwrite them – is the very thing that condemns her to ongoing ruin/abjection.

Joel Robbins (2004, 2007) explores this kind of irreconcilable torment through what he calls "the morality of freedom" – whereby the subject is continuously forced to navigate themselves through radically contradictory sets of values. This state is held in contrast to "the morality of reproduction" which arises in situations where there is a clear hierarchy of values for the prescription of moral conduct. Critically, these two kinds of morality are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, Robbins is compelled to remind us that these two Janus "faces" of morality will always exist simultaneously in a given culture, though the proportionality of their effect on a subject's conduct will vary contingently as he or she passes through different "value spheres" of life.

Robbins explores these ideas in his ethnography of the Urapmin of Papua New Guinea, whose conversion to a form of Pentecostal Christianity created an ongoing and irreconcilable tension at the ontological level, specifically between the old set of traditional moral values and the new Christian set. This ontological transition thus constituted an inversion of their ethical *telos* – from the assertion of will in the service of "big men" to its repudiation in the service of God. The ethical substance driving their self-formation had thus been turned inside-out: actions that were previously dedicated to the external assertion of wilful desires were now replaced with a deep internal attention to management and suppression of those same desires, the result being a pervasive

moral tension that, owing to their ongoing entrenchment in subsistence living, can never be truly reconciled.

Their “moral torment” thus comes from being ensnared in an irreconcilable tension between two contradictory sets of values. In a double-bind that echoes the Urapmin context, Lisa too finds herself caught up in the radical tension between her embodied techniques-of-the-self and the top-down moral codes prescribed by institutionalised hierarchies. That being said, whilst Lisa’s ethics of escape certainly cut against the grain of society’s established moral values, these techniques do not constitute a “conversion,” i.e. a collective repudiation of one set of values in favour of another. In this sense, to the extent that Lisa has turned her back on conventional society, so *society has turned its back on her*, forcing her to imagine and carve out alternative ways-of-being that simultaneously preclude her from getting back on society’s good side. The result is a kind of teleological contradiction in which the simultaneously transformative and self-escaping goal of intoxicated becoming stands in direct opposition to her aspirations of “clean” sobriety, “good citizenship” and “proper” motherhood.

I will take this opportunity to reaffirm that neither Lisa’s addiction nor her “madness” should be framed as medical “conditions,” but rather as a clinical labels transfigured into social facts, social facts that in turn shape specific political realities. These political realities, playing out in the interstitial tissue of society’s ever-fattening underbelly, bring about serious sanctions and personal costs on the persons so labelled. It is a social and political prescription that legitimises a set of disciplinary controls whereby the addict is at once abjected and absorbed by privileged others, others ‘who are medically empowered, morally obliged, and legally sanctioned, to become responsible for the person labelled’ (Laing 1967:100). The homeless addict is thus swallowed up not into one, but two pathological socio-political identifiers, and forced to endure a career as patient, criminal and sinner; a path that is beaten for them by a “conspiracy” of family, mental health professionals, doctors, nurses, policeman, judges, psychiatrists, social workers and often, fellow patients/criminals/sinners. On the outside Lisa must remain,

until at best she is (re)qualified by an “ex,” a prefix she must carry round her neck that will, whether she likes it or not, constitute the suffix of her remaining life.

Returning briefly to the Urapmin’s moral torment, Robbins suggests that the closest they get to the *telos* of a Christian ethics, itself unreachable due to their material and relational conditions, is during ritualised performance where the participants become possessed by the Holy Spirit, who briefly absolves them of all their sins. It is perhaps equally fitting that for the Urapmin as for Lisa, the closest either get in reality to any kind of teleological resolution vis-à-vis their ethical projects is through un/controllable bouts of ritualised possession in which the morally tormented subject *becomes somebody else*. In both cases, the resolution is only partial, the ultimate *telos* remaining, as I have shown in the previous chapter, always just out of reach. This then, is the structural form of the ethical-object, a *telos* that resolves itself only through its inherent irresolvability. This relation of being irremovably entangled in that which one opposes, this turning of the body inside-out to produce alternative modalities of the same body, to bring forth a kind of corporeal and socio-political metamorphosis that is not a “pure” transcendence of these relations of power, but a Sisyphean labour of carving out a dwelling from resources inevitably “impure,” is evoked by Deleuze (2004:176) through what he calls *the silent crack*.

The Silent Crack

For Lisa, this silent cracking that constitutes the depth of her tragic predicament is felt as an unrelenting series of surface tears: *‘I tell you, it just feels like one fucking thing after another, you know? Like it’s never gonna end.’* Embedded in the compound fractures that constitute Lisa’s ongoing situation are thus echoes of Deleuze’s affirmation that loss is life’s most unchangeable condition. More than any other urban group, the homeless are defined by their losses.

Indeed, it is especially fitting that Deleuze opens his chapter on alcoholism quoting F. Scott Fitzgerald: ‘Of course, all life is a process of breaking down’ (*ibid*). London’s

homeless addicts know this as a matter of ontological fact. For Deleuze, the embodied techniques of the self implicit within drug-taking can be analysed through the Fitzgeraldian image of the “crack.” The crack is the means through which external “events” become incorporated into the “thickness” of the body. It is the silent obverse of the “noisy accidents” that befall a person in the process of break(ing)down. In Lisa’s case, the death of her first partner and family, the loss of her second child, the abandonment of her first, Trent’s constant incarcerations, the humiliation of homelessness and sex work, and now the handover of Baby Dennis can all be described as “noisy” in the external sense. At the same time, however, these noisy outside events cause a crack to emerge from the inside, so tacitly that it goes practically unnoticed, and as a result of its invisibility and intangibility, it is given carte-blanche to press on with its destructive intentions, the break(ing)down.

The silent crack, as simultaneously internal and external, surface and depth, creeps up on Lisa initially without her noticing, leaving behind a trail of scar tissue, such that when she finally becomes aware, it is already too late. Lisa’s mournful profession – *‘I don’t even know how I got myself into this mess’*⁸⁵ – is a cultural statement to this effect. From a Deleuzian perspective then, it is not simply the traumas themselves that cause a person’s life to break down, but rather it is the silent incarnation of these traumas that eventually “cracks them up.”

The crack then, is not within as if structurally opposite to the noisy events that come from without, rather it is that which remains and operates *on the threshold of the surface*. The slicing of taut flesh, the pricking of a (not so) plump vein – these are Lisa’s secret ceremonies that occur at the body’s transitional surface, the suddenly-open-skin now swallowing the noisy events destined to become scar tissue, to drive the crack’s

⁸⁵ This expression, or variations thereof, emerges time and time again amongst the urban homeless. Statements like this point to the realisation a person has when, without quite knowing how it happened, he/she is suddenly thrown into, and caught up in, a state-of-being: the conditions of which are set by the ontological realities/potentialities of that situation. When Trent, a long standing user of both crack and heroin, says that he wants to *‘get out of the situation’* he finds himself in, he is articulating the recognition that his situation is at once an idiosyncrasy of which he has become a component, and also a dense amassment that both pre-dates his own enmeshment within it, and as already having existed, eclipses his local embodiment of it.

silent progression. We might therefore say that if Lisa is seeking the limits of her own body, she does so necessarily in order to transgress them. Indeed, Lisa knows full well that getting off/out her head and chopping up her forearms will actively negate any chance of being a mother to Dennis, and yet is precisely because of this fear, this crippling absence, that she seeks the drug and the knife. Evoking Sartre, we might propose that Lisa is never more aware of the existential and ethical complexities of her tragic situation than in that perversely gratifying moment of *wanting what she does not want*.⁸⁶ Ultimately, Lisa's moral torment is driven by the fact that she has been forced to change herself rather than the world.

In these dual moments of cutting and cracking, we bear witness to a double blockage of Turner's extended liminality; the simultaneous expression of the *no longer* and the *not yet*. Indeed, by virtue of being stuck in this clotted space, we can see how the traumatic losses of Lisa's past rise up from deep towards her bodily surface in the form of a fatal repetition, just as the virtuality of all her immanently lost futures also creep into her being, both impinging simultaneously on the intoxicated present through the tip of the blade.

In this way, Lisa's addicted, abject body – understood here as a relationally-charged ethical instrument – is an open yet bandaged wound, an escape and a prison. When Lisa was found on the bench cutting herself in a drug-fuelled daze, the surface crack of her child's handover became aligned and drawn together with the hydraulic shock that defines the deep bodily crack, at the same time rendering her possibility of being a mother in the future highly insecure. According to Deleuze, these two levels (surface and depth) draw closer to one another via drugs, madness, or suicide. Of this triumvirate, drugs are said to be the 'most perfect, because, rather than bringing the two lines together in a fatal point, they take time' (2004:178). We can, I think, view Lisa's opening up and subsequent turning inside-out of her body through intoxication and self-harm as an ethnographic example of Deleuzian cracking. Put another way, by turning

⁸⁶ We can see this paradox manifest itself when, high on crack and heroin, Lisa talks effusively about the need to "get clean" and "sort herself out" so that she can "make a new life with the baby."

her body into an ethical instrument that is simultaneously the site of her escape and her abjection, the ongoing tragedies of her “junkied” present are inscribed *into* the depths of her body whilst past tragedies simultaneously draw themselves up *from* the depths of her body to incorporate these new, unique surface tears. In these moments, where surface and depth co-intersect, *where knife explores wound*, Lisa’s drawing-together of these two levels entraps her even deeper into the moral torment of her predicament, forcing her to keep inventing ways of living in a fundamentally unliveable situation.

Burst Bodies

In demarcating addiction as a kind of slowmo “bursting” of body and self, Deleuze was looking to draw our attention to way that surface and depth or ‘sound and silence’ (*ibid*) gradually intersect together behind a person’s back to form potentially fatal patterns. In his discussion of Fitzgerald in *The Logic of Sense* – as extraordinary as it is dense – Deleuze explores the connection between alcoholism and melancholia, in particular the way that the drinker looks to preserve rather than relinquish what has been lost, an idea that has been already garnered significant theoretical and ethnographic attention over the course of this thesis. The addict, Deleuze suggests, identifies the tragic flaw or crack worming its way through the depths of their being and responds by assuming control over the cracking, as if somehow mastering it, not by transcending it as such, but by becoming a novel version of it, *expersonating* it in Wagner’s terms, so that it *is* them, rather than something that happens *to* them.

For Lisa as for all the other homeless addicts of *Itchy Park*, working through the losses of the past, both deep and immediate, is not a simple case of “getting over” what is now gone, but also of recognising and dealing with the residual pain inevitably burnt into the present, along with the haunting shadow of the future. The point is that loss always leaves a remainder. As forces with undefined borders, the melancholic phantoms that stalk Lisa’s present are like a stain set into the fabric of her existence, a sore thumb that she detects and then expersonates, thereby *becoming a crack unto herself*.

As far as Deleuze is concerned, a “burst” or “cracked” body, a life wiped out by drugs – such as Lisa’s – is no longer able to escape/transform its inherent entropy; that is to say it is ultimately stripped of any transcendental value. Deleuze (*ibid*:178) says as much when he asks: ‘If there is a crack at the surface, how can we prevent deep life from becoming a demolition job?’ In ethical terms, he is essentially asking: what good are these kind of ethical self-modifications if they constitute an existential crisis in and of themselves? From his perspective, the transformative power of the addicted relationship is neutered by its fundamentally internecine nature.

The “burst” life of the addict provides a fitting entry point for Deleuze to think about the paradoxical potentiality of human existence, of its twin capacity for creativity and destruction. Again evoking Fitzgerald, Deleuze argues that part of the inevitable entropy of existence – its inherent “value” – is its capacity to go beyond itself in the meantime, through which Death can be transfigured into *something else*. As a result, Deleuze feels that, even in spite of its destructive power, the experience of “cracking-up” is so radical that it must simultaneously contain certain creative potentialities. The question then, is how to harness this kind of radical creative potential without personifying it? Deleuze indeed finds himself wondering, if the ‘eternal truth of the event’ is only digestible to consciousness once it has been inscribed into the ‘wound’s eternal truth,’ how do we ‘give the crack the chance of flying over its own incorporeal surface area, without stopping at the bursting of each body...to go farther than we would have believed possible’ (*ibid*:182). In other words, how do we mobilise the creative energy of the crack without drawing its two aligned forms together at the fatal point?

Pondering this question, Deleuze considers whether recourse to art might enable the “delirium” of addiction to become a productive force. In his eyes, the goal of art is to extract and make manifest the subjective features of existence, both human and nonhuman. In this sense, art is about distillation of experience – affect and percept – into “pure sensation.” The *sensation* is above all the process by which the artwork transcends its lived form whilst simultaneously *becoming* the very thing it expresses. Art, from this perspective, can therefore be understood as a monument to itself. Furthermore, for this

process to properly occur, the artist cannot be absent from his creation, instead he must become an affect himself, thereby drawing us, the beholder, into the sensation. As Deleuze (1994:176) puts it, they ‘make us become with them.’ This is why Deleuze felt so drawn to the work of Fitzgerald, Burroughs and Michaux, for he saw etched into their prose this “language of sensations,” a language that captures a particular force of life and being, specifically that of intoxicated delirium. Most importantly for Deleuze, their work – itself a kind of composed chaos⁸⁷ – not only enables him to engage with their delirium, but to do so from a safe distance.

This is why Deleuze esoterically quips that we should consider getting drunk on pure water, ‘to succeed in getting high, but by abstention’ (2013:333). What this means is, rather than thinking of drugs as either something you take or something you don’t, Deleuze proposes a third way, a “middle” ground through which non-users can engage with the risks already taken by users. After explicitly affirming that psychoactive drugs have fundamentally transformed the doors of human perception, Deleuze feels that now these doors have effectively been blown open, we no longer need drugs to pass through them. In other words, just because someone else has used explosives to blow a hole in a wall does not mean we also need explosives to propel ourselves through said hole; we can simply walk through. In other words, the hard work has already been done for us, the risk already taken. This is what he means when he says that ‘drugs do not guarantee immanence; rather the immanence of drugs allows one to forgo them’ (2013:315). Let the professionals – the (addicted) artists – handle it: sit back from a safe distance, let them blow out the wall, and then join them in the “middle,” finding a way to walk through the hole without having to blow it up yourself. As he profoundly puts it: ‘go a short way further to see for ourselves, be a little alcoholic, a little crazy, a little suicidal...just enough to extend the crack, but not enough to deepen it irredeemably’ (2004:179).

In this way, the “event of intoxication” is able to move through the body without bursting it, absorbing its affective truths and extending out into an aesthetics of sobriety

⁸⁷ What Joyce would have called a *chaosmos*.

(Goddard 2005) that can help us engineer new modalities of being. Without art, the transformational limit of extreme intoxication is, for Deleuze, the limit of the burst(ing) body, a body he sees as doomed to turn back in on itself; a line-of-flight destined for negation. As far as he is concerned, the unhidden cost of creativity via addiction is the potential risk of enduring bodily death – in which vitality turns in on itself and reduces the body to an empty shell. Instead, with the help of artistic transfiguration, Deleuze invites us to turn the psychopathological breakdown into a creative “sober” breakthrough.

The Skin Canvas

Bound up in this notion of sober breakthrough is Deleuze and Guattari’s stated preference for ‘syncretism rather than ethnographic study, [for] the protocol of an experiment rather than an account of initiation’ (2013:161-162). When it comes to drugs, their reluctance to engage with the ethnographic, I posit, blunts the edge of their theoretical assertions. As I have argued throughout this thesis, for many of the urban homeless, the pursuit of transformative reinvention via drugs is stitched into the ontological conditions of their existence. In many ways, it is the only way they can live. And yet this does not make them empty souls quietly living/dying out their tragic predicament. On the contrary, I posit that the urban homeless are in fact the very embodiment of Deleuze and Guattari’s call to self-experiment, opening up their bodies to the multiplicities and intensities of a world that appears set out to ensnare them. As this chapter draws to a close, I offer some brief reflections on this idea, returning once more to the cracked boundaries of Lisa’s body; exploring her self-wounding not so much as an inevitable bursting, but as a kind of self-experiment – a *becoming* unto itself.

As this chapter has already established, Lisa’s wounds can be said to possess their own temporality; they are a cleavage unto the past, a crack in her skinfilm through which the noisy events of her unhinged present draw together with deeper, more historic tragedies. And yet hidden within the wound itself is the potential for an alternative, almost *secret* future, one that is not yet lost, but very much alive and at work, built into the bodily

realities (the “actual”) of the living present; *the scar*. In this way, by working through her crisis-of-presence by cutting herself, Lisa simultaneously lays the groundwork for the scarification of her bodily surface, and in doing so she *re-presences* herself.

Approached as an act of pragmatic intervention, self-wounding of this type not only assures her of a precarious yet definite place in the now, it promises healing in future, therein promising *a future*. Through cutting herself, the skin becomes an artefact of past losses but also solidifies an artefact of the present in the form of her scars, indicating that she has survived the before, and will again: *that she can take some kind of control*.⁸⁸ After all, what is scar tissue if not the *presencing of absence*, of the body as an instrument of transformation but also hope – slim and precarious though it may be?

If Lisa’s scarification is masochistic, it is masochistic in the performative sense. Indeed, not unlike the spectacles of self-starvation undertaken by the late artist Chris Burden, Lisa’s intoxicated self-mutilation deeply unsettles the public spaces in which it is performed, producing, in Patrick Anderson’s words, ‘a psychic and social scene that depends heavily on the systems of specularity through which it names and describes itself’ (2007:151). In other words, by cutting herself in public, Lisa induces a kind of witnessing that renders her embodied cracking hyper-visible, in the process producing the conditions that constitute the very world in which masochism is likely to emerge. In this sense, despite these bodily cracks forming at both her surface and her depth, there remains in the background – though soft and muffled – the promise of transformation, of creativity (reciprocally bound up in destruction though it may be). Her skin, her primary instrument of masochistic control, is a boundary like few others, one that was breached by her newborn baby only very recently, breached now by the familiar puncturing of needle and knife. In this sense, her skin-membrane regains its solidity even as she masochistically escapes her presence; in the process enlisting the moral force of disciplinary power to play the sadist; a role it is invariably compelled to play. In this way, by conceptualising Lisa’s body – her canvas – as simultaneously wound and knife, we can understand how the formation of scar tissue – as an artefact of past loss but also

⁸⁸ Albeit a form of control that will only ever be partial at best, and one that will be forever encompassed within the overlapping hauntological spheres of tragic pasts and lost futures.

a future presence – is part of the on-going tug-of-war between the need to “recover” presence whilst also fulfilling the escapist need to absence herself.

In the following chapter, I will be looking more specifically at how the “cracking up” that underwrites the social dimensions of the ethical-subject is not only embodied but also *performed*. This will allow me to extend the concept of the bodily canvas a step further, asking under what conditions addicted bodies might be seen as works of art unto themselves. In taking this undeniably experimental approach, I will be pushing Deleuze’s ideas surrounding the transformative power of art into somewhat uncharted waters, in the process probing the homeless-addicted body for a political potential that is yet to be fully explored within the context of anthropology. To the sceptical reader, it is above all my hope that the ethnographic and theoretical groundwork laid down thus far over the course of the thesis has earned me, if nothing else, the benefit of the doubt.

Chapter Six: The Politics of Anaesthesia

Temporal (An)aesthetics

If the previous chapter was occupied with locating the ethical among morally fraught, embodied and potentially abjectifying techniques of body and self, this chapter takes as its main concern the particular “form” that these (ethical-abject) techniques take within the public space of homelessness. In approaching the form of these technologies, I will extend my analysis of the blacked-out body, exploring it as a kind of ongoing somatic “transformance,”⁸⁹ in which addicted bodies are stretched and metamorphosed across grotesque boundaries. Viewed through this lens, I will show that the burst(ing) body need not be reducible to a ruined body, but can instead come to be understood as a kind of *political body-art* unto itself. To reach this understanding, this chapter will look to draw together a number of divergent thinkers from a range of different scholarly milieus; from feminist theory, anthropology, performance studies, and continental philosophy. Resisting the urge to present anything resembling a literary survey, I will instead endeavour to let the ethnography take the lead, interspacing the relevant theoretical scaffolding when necessary, ensuring that the active, living bodies of my fieldwork are the ones shaping the theory, rather than the other way around.

To appreciate why a burst(ing) body can also be thought of as a *political* one, I invite the reader yet again to consider the experience of the blackout, and in particular the ways in which its radical temporality/relationality carves out alternative means of being-in-the-world. Recalling Jay and his increasing tendency to drift into blackout, to *become somebody else*, I would invite us here to pay special attention to his regular party-trick of tearing open cider cans, in which he invariably shreds his lips to pieces only to have no idea the next day as to how such injuries have come about. These moments are, I

⁸⁹ Transformance: a blending between “transformation” and “performance” (coined by Baron-Cohen [2011]), formed to expedite this idea of performance as possessing a transformational capacity, simultaneously for the participant(s) and the audience. Given the transformative power of drugs in relation to the publicness of homeless intoxication, the term feels appropriate.

suggest, performative in nature. Under these conditions, with the reproducible past of his memory reduced to the shattering silence of alcoholic possession, the language of the body increasingly sets the existential and ethical stakes for Jay, ‘answer[ing] the world by authoring it’ (Clark and Holquist 1984:175). As far as Jay is concerned, these blood-soaked performances are not his doing, rather they are attributable to somebody else. Understood here as a body possessed by a force that cannot be reflexively accessed, Jay’s blacked-out self effectively robs the present of its chronopolitical foundations, neutering the future of its normative demands and thus cutting at history against the grain.

As I intend to show, blacked-out bodies such as Jay’s do not conform to the “temporal aesthetics”⁹⁰ played out by (re)productive members of society, rather they march to the beat of an entirely different temporal drum, to a rhythm that is intrinsically *anaesthetic*. Articulated thus far as an obviate being constituted by anaesthetic drift, Jay’s blacked-out self can be described as embodying a particular kind of politics, a kind of politics that differs (that is to say produces or “does” difference) from *within*, rather than between (Holbraad and Pedersen 2009). Accordingly, this thesis has tried to continually circle around this particular body politic, showing how, through the inside-out ontology of the blackout (in which transformative dissociation is sought *internally* rather than externally), and in response to certain moral and economic demands, addicted persons are able to use drugs as a means of “altering from themselves” (*ibid*). In this sense, by publically configuring a different relationship between self and past through *becoming somebody else*, the blackout can be said to comprise a novel temporal (an)aesthetic that is above all *performed*. These public transformances reveal new modes of temporal experience, new ways of becoming Other, and new subjectivities that are politically bound to what I have previously described as an “ethics of (self) escape” – a way-of-being that is as abjectifying as it is emancipatory.

⁹⁰ In the spirit laid down by Jacques Rancière, I use the term *aesthetics* not to describe a theory of “sensibility” or “taste,” instead viewing it as ‘configurations of experience that create new modes of sense perception and induce novel forms of political subjectivity’ (2004:9).

The blacked-out body then, understood thus far as an *expersonation* of the very losses it seeks to escape, functions as a stage on which the spectacle of relational tragedy can be inscribed into the flesh, what Nora could well have been describing when he wrote of ‘moments of history torn away from the movement of history, then returned; no longer quite life, not yet death, like shells on the shore when the sea of living memory has receded’ (1989:12). As an expersonate effigy of the ghosts that haunt him, the blacked-out body is a very novel kind of ghost, namely one *with* a body. The blacked-out body then, *as a presence that lives as an absence*, effectively renders these ghosts more concrete or rather more “particular” than when it originally found them (where before they were bodyless and stuck in the past, now they are *bodyful* and stuck in the present). This *impossible form* lies beyond both the reproductive currency of the past and the normative parameters of agency and discipline, in the process becoming a different point-of-view, and thus a political subject (Viveiros de Castro 1998a), that stands antithetically outside the chronopolitical regime of late-liberalism. Stitched into the underbelly of the modern cityscape, these impossible political bodies are, to borrow a term from Bakhtin, intrinsically *heteroglossic*, insofar as they constitute an interruption of the dominant or “monoglossic” political aesthetic, instead performing their anaesthesia through a plurality of voices condensed within a pluralised body.

The Cyborg: Intoxicated Body Politics

Peggy Phelan (1998) argues that what makes performance so politically radical, so heteroglossic, is its capacity to continually blur the distinction between temporal senses, to cleave open the singular pathway between beginning and ending. In these moments, Phelan claims, even the gap between the living and the dead becomes hard to distinguish. It is precisely from these “in-betweens” that addictive transformance’s political potential springs. For Jay, as with the other homeless protagonists that have graced these pages, self, body and Other can be seen to be on very intimate terms indeed. Indeed, as laid out in chapter four, the re-inventions of self that occur through blacking-out call into question certain conventional oppositions – what Strathern (1991) calls the “dualities of encompassment.” At the same time, however (and with a nod in

Wagner's direction), someone might very well chime in at this point and remind the reader that the particular theorising of homeless alterity offered up in this thesis is itself an invention on the part of yours truly, the anthropologist. According to Holbraad (2007) though, it is precisely this recursive loop between the existential concerns of the Other and the theoretical gaze of the ethnographer that makes anthropology a distinctly ontological exercise; a productive enterprise 'by which concepts are transformed in the very act of being "applied" in new contexts' (*ibid*:21).

Strathern (1991) takes a similar position, conceiving ethnography as a particular "conception" of culture into which ethnography provides a bridge. In this way, by framing ethnography above all as a means of "evoking" reality rather than "comparing" reality, Strathern called into question the very epistemic foundations of anthropology itself – namely the taken-for-granted idea that we are in the business of descriptively "scaling" different cultures against each other. Ultimately, Strathern suggests that anthropology has been acting on false pretences, namely that trying to "scale" the infinite plurality of the world into comparative boxes ignores the fact that every "thing" is always already *more and less than itself*, that they are scales unto themselves (Holbraad and Pedersen 2009:374). In this way, comparison gives way to "partial connections," the key point being that relations precede entities, a principle that effectively throws into question certain assumptions about the "introspective" constitution of subjectivity. She argues that what really constitutes the person is an exteriority that cannot be encompassed by the inward-facing subject, pointing instead to the various outward interruptions of the self (what Holbraad and Pedersen call "extrospection") that constitute daily experience. Through these ongoing moments of *extrospection*, persons form connections with others in a partial way, thereby allowing this external otherness to leap over the wall-of-self and form new centres of subjectivity.

To depict these "postplural" ideas, Strathern invoked the image of the cyborg: a cyborg contains an integrated circuit that is above all constituted by its incomplete connections. It is partially man and partially machine, so that its very composition negates conventional divisions between human and nonhuman, natural and technological,

subject and object, self and nonself. In this sense, the partial quality of these connections ensures that the cyborg remains integrated without becoming singular: '[it is] a circuit of connections that joins parts that cannot be compared insofar as they are not isomorphic with one another' (Strathern 1991:54). In other words, the cyborg lives in a perpetual state of ambiguity – n/either this, n/either that.

The cyborg has, in recent times, captured the public imagination most prominently as a symbol of apocalypse, the vengeful horseman of a hyper-militarised patriarchal capitalism run amok. Despite what Hollywood might have us believe, Schwarzenegger's *Terminator* did not mark the origin of cyborg discourse. The fact is that ambiguous, hybrid *beings* – part-human part-nonhuman – have permeated art, literature and cosmogenic myth for centuries. In more recent times, the image of the cyborg body has – courtesy of Donna Haraway's (1990) emergence onto the social science scene – increasingly been used as an imaginative resource through which to engender feminist critiques of the body. Haraway's transgender student, Sandy Stone, took her mentor's work even further, calling attention to the modern gender clinic as a violent "technology of inscription." In short, by reinforcing above all the need for the transsexual body to "pass" physically as its new gender, the clinic essentially negated the possibility of any kind of meaningful counter-discourse. In other words, by slipping chameleon-like into the "normal" population, the transsexual body forfeits its intrinsic capacity to 'authentically represent the complexities and ambiguities of lived experience' (1992:164). Arguing that the "wrong" body is nothing but a phallogentric myth of biomedicine, Stone calls on transsexuals to affirm their subjective ambiguities rather than disguising them through passing, the aim being to dismantling the totalising power of the medical gaze, in particular its capacity to act as the protector of cultural norms.

Like Stone, Jackie Orr (1990, 1999, 2006) is also concerned with what it is like to exist in the "wrong" kind of body, namely the pathological body of the hysteric. Half social scientist half patient, Orr explores the link between individual psychiatric conditions and the socio-historic forces that shape them, drawing profound connections between the historical threat of nuclear holocaust and the epidemic emergence of panic disorders in

twentieth century America. Her work explores the rise of these disorders against the backdrop of an increasingly medicalised and diagnostic culture, a culture where neuropsychiatry, cybernetics and psychopharmaceuticals are so intimately interwoven that society itself is basically screaming out for a Xanax. Her point, ultimately, is that as bio-technological forms of knowledge become more and more pervasive, the subjective life of the disordered body becomes a kind of corporate cash-cow, thereby reshaping the link between “symptomology” and the flow of capital invested in “ordering” that very affliction. She notes, for example, how the efficacy of drug treatments on a limited selection of hysterical symptoms essentially constructed the inner reality of the disease itself, thereby justifying the diagnostic category.

In this sense, we might say that the homeless-addicted body has much in common with the hysterical body of Orr’s writing, insofar as the fusion of scientific, moral, judicial and pharmaceutical interests has also dragged the addicted subject into a new “technocratic” system that promises at once to name and erase the condition in question. This contradiction is embodied perhaps most emphatically by the state-sponsored prescription of methadone for heroin addicts – an opioid replacement that blocks feelings of euphoria. Described by Bourgois as ‘a biological technology that facilitates a moral block to pleasure’ (2000:169), methadone therapy effectively transforms the junkie into a patient. By “conquering” the addict’s inner life and supposedly preventing him from slipping into unproductive cycles of escapist anaesthesia, methadone treatment is meant to facilitate a return to “productive” forms of life, namely employment. For the men and women of *Itchy Park*, however, methadone did not provide freedom from the bondage of heroin addiction, if anything becoming just a new type of master, one that ruled with a particular type of tyranny. As Tony puts it:

‘If you miss your scrips you’re fucked. Sometimes it’s so hard to keep track of time, to remember when your appointment is. Before you know it the pharmacy is closed and you’re stranded. Clucking. So then you’ve got to score [heroin], keep yourself topped up. And it’s not like the meth gets you high. Takes all the joy out of it, makes you feel numb, like the living dead most of the time. We only take it to try and keep ourselves on

an even keel. Plus I drink so much more on the meth, and that's when I start to lost track of time and forget things.'

As a disciplinary tool, part of what Orr coined “psychopower,” methadone ironically tends to create the very problems it purports to solve. Left emotionally numb and physically listless by his “joyless” treatment programme, Tony – still chronically unemployed – not only fails on the productivity front, he is also, by virtue of his ongoing drinking and substance use, unable to consistently synchronise his daily rhythm with that of the methadone clinic. This clash, between the institutional temporality of the clinic versus that of his addiction, leaves him in a state of perpetual anxiety, confusion and withdrawal, in the process pushing him into intensive and disorienting bouts of polydrug abuse. So on a given day, depending on what kind of opiate he puts into his body, Tony finds himself oscillating between “deviant” junkie and “dutiful” patient, or, in other words, between the wrong and the right kind of body.

So, like the hysterical and indeed the transsexual body, we can see that homeless-addicted body has also been “inscribed” with varying degrees of social and political exclusion, the moral boundaries of which are dictated by a disciplinary medical discourse that controls what counts as the “wrong” type of body. In Phelan’s (1992) terms, all three have been “marked” as Others. Given their shared history of exclusion and medicalisation, not to mention the emphasis I have placed thus far on its intrinsically ambiguous and plural constitution, it seems worthwhile to also explore the homeless-addicted body through the cyborgian lens.

Inside Out

In her seminal work on the ontology of cyborg bodies Haraway (1990:144) states that ‘the cyborg is a kind of disassembled and reassembled, postmodern collective and personal self.’ I contend that this “disassembling” and “reassembling” of self is also manifest in the obviational reinventing of personhood that occurs when homeless addicts chemically extricate themselves from the bewilderment of existential boredom

through narcotic possession. As this thesis draws to a close, my re-articulation of these bodies as temporally hybridized and performative beings will unlock the potential for the homeless addict to operate as an embodied critique of late-liberal capitalism, in the process showing us the very limits of our politics as they currently stand. In taking this approach, I am positing a move away from depictions of the homeless-addicted body as worthless, immoral, and undesirable to a more “postplural” body that is itself a distinct kind of *political subject*. This focus on the political can be seen as part of a now long-standing imperative within anthropology, namely the desire to faithfully connect to the lived experience of our informants, to explore how even under precarious conditions of socio-political exclusion, people are still able to find alternative ways-of-being (Biehl et al. 2007).

In addition to the image of the cyborg, I will also be invoking the notion of the grotesque to think through the performative qualities of public intoxication, drawing extensively on Mikhail Bakhtin as point of reference. Above all else, the grotesque body is at once ambivalent and oppositional; in the process remaining polluting, monstrous, and *repulsive* to the dominant bodily and temporal aesthetics, the aesthetics of the “contained” individual. As Bakhtin himself asserts, ‘they are contrary to the classic images of the finished, completed man’ (1968:25).

It is my intention to situate these grotesque bodily projects within the arena of “cyborg transformance.” In these cyborg transformances, living performing bodies are seen as integrated with the relational technology of drugs, the result of which is a radical restructuring of the existential conditions that underwrite subjectivity and identity. As Parker-Starbuck (2006:257) says on the matter: ‘The cyborg [transformance] space necessitates a face-to-face exchange between performers and audience, which can be instrumental in creating an ethical space – an open and visible pace in which to stop and see what is before you.’

Consider Jay’s tendency to rip into cans with his teeth. The Dionysian frenzy with which he tears into them can be viewed, I suggest, as a violent and explosive

transformance, made all the more visceral by the fact that it takes place in prime urban space. As “normal people” walk past Jay, can in hand, blood spilling from his face, they are no longer able to look through and past him. Instead, by virtue of his grotesque and maniacal bodily conduct, they are forced to look *at* him. The passer-by is, in a sense, co-opted into becoming an audience member by the sheer physicality of the transformance, forcing them to intellectually and emotionally engage with the unfolding grotesquery as it plays out in the arena of their own “real life.” In this sense, the experience of homelessness is, to one degree or another, a lot about being seen, or in the performative sense, *being scene*. As I have demonstrated in previous chapters, the condition of homelessness enjoys a strange paradox, insofar as a person can be under constant surveillance and yet suffer simultaneously from what can often feel like a total sense of invisibility. Begging for money and other forms of panhandling are just one of the more prominent everyday performative forms of seeking interaction and recognition. Public intoxication then, is perhaps another step up from begging, in which the passer-by is somewhat impelled, by virtue of its grotesque visibility, to engage with and “look upon” the living form of their precarity, *to be at once seen and scene*. Though I did not realise it at the time, I had already received this Bakhtinian message loud and clear within twenty-four hours of beginning my fieldwork in the *St Mungo’s Rehousing Hub*.

The staff entrance at the back of the hub was open, which was odd, given that I had been specifically told during orientation that the door was to remain locked under all circumstances. Clearly today was the exception that proved the rule. On arriving through the staff door, I was met with the most unimaginable stench. I was told by a man who had worked for a number of years in a hospice that this particular odour was as close as you could hope to get to rotting flesh. As olfactory experiences go, this was easily the most jarring and visceral I had ever been through. The smell was coming from a homeless man called Jarik. His clothes were clearly soiled, and it was obvious that he had not been acquainted with any form of running water for some time. The smell not only followed Jarik around, it also colonised every room he had been in, clinging to every molecule with parasitic zeal.

It turns out that Jarik had been drinking non-stop, day-in-day-out, for the past two months. He was offered the chance to have a shower, but refused on the basis that he was feeling too sick from coming off the booze. Without warning, Jarik suddenly started convulsing and fell off his chair. There was vomit everywhere. Helping him off the floor, Jarik grabbed me, telling me that he had “crystals” somewhere in his head, that he required a surgeon to remove them, only then would he be well again. Trying to calm Jarik down, I did everything in my power to avoid throwing up. Some of the Broadway staff did not possess the same constitution. As Jarik’s convulsions increase in speed and intensity, the decision was made to call an ambulance. When the paramedics finally arrive, Jarik was holding his temples and shaking uncontrollably, still talking about the “crystals” lodged somewhere inside his brain, begging the paramedics remove them. Conscious that his body might burst into a fit of spasms at any moment, the ambulance team carefully moved Jarik into a wheelchair, strapping him down to guard against any sudden movements, and putting him in a neck-brace to stop any wild thrashing of his head. Tears streaming down his face, limbs immobilised, Jarik was wheeled out of the hub by the paramedics in front of everyone, looking every part the maniacal and incurable alcoholic.

There were streaks of excrement all around the chairs. No matter how hard I tried, it seemed impossible to get the area clean. This incident occurred on only my first day in the field. Back then I did not know what to make of it, beyond viewing it as something of a baptism of fire. Looking back on it now, with the smell returning to me in the form of some vicious Proustian poison, it is hard not to re-imagine Jarik’s faecal break(ing)down as a brutal performance of real-world grotesquery, his mephitic collapse and subsequent extraction from the building as an already inextricable part of the “pathology” of street alcoholism, and in particular how these social pathologies are tied to the base functions of the body that so often determine the grotesque. The smell of rotting flesh, the streaks of shit across the floor, blood pouring from the mouth, the slicing of blade into supple flesh; these ethnographic vignettes clearly cannot be properly told without describing the opening of some kind of orifice. These are the

liminal boundaries of the grotesque body, made manifest in the leaking of internal substance through the bodily openings.

Scene to Be Disgusting

In turning themselves inside out, Jarik, Jay, Max and Lisa stain public space with the most private of their incarnate filth. In these moments, where inside becomes outside, boundary fluidity is sought through fluids. For several days after the incident, the staff lament their inability to “get Jarik out the building” – something of him lingered. His insides, no longer visible, nevertheless remain stained into the hub’s historico-molecular fabric. Jarik’s inside, in becoming outside through the grotesque medium of the orifice, had transformed and disfigured the previously reified inside-outside boundaries of the St Mungo’s hub. As Leanne put it at the time: *‘I just can’t believe how disgusting it still is. We’ve scrubbed all the rooms like ten times, used bleach and everything. We just can’t seem to get rid of him.’* In a very real sense, Jarik’s shit-soaked “delirium” had transformed the re-housing hub into a grotesque echo-chamber in which the normally distinct categories of inside and outside had become grotesquely collapsed into one another, instilling the space with what felt to the staff like an immovable fog of disgust.

On top of that, let us not forget that Jarik’s break(ing)down was not a private matter, rather it enjoyed a particular audience, and audience that could no longer avert their eyes, that could not help but become a living part of the scene itself. In Debord’s (1992) terms, Jarik and Jay’s bodily eversions constitute an act of *détournement*, a “hijacking” of public space that viscerally snaps the passer-by out of his entrancement with whatever taken-for-granted veneer constitutes his or her daily reality. We can call this “kind” of enforced looking *witnessing*, in that it differs markedly from the empirical ideal of the “objective” observer. To be a witness is to be part of the performance’s furniture, to possess a specific and embodied perspective. Whether they step onto this stage by choice or stumble onto it by accident, the witness cannot help but constitute the space of someone else’s drama. Furthermore, Taylor (1998:182) reminds us that ‘the position of the witness is always multiple’ – simultaneously internal and external,

spectacle and audience. The witness is an integral partner in the meaning-making process, they are irremovably *in* the event insofar as their very presence cannot help but define its limits. In witnessing, there is no keyhole through which to hide behind, no invisible canvas from which to watch “uninterrupted.” In witnessing, you become the active part of the Other’s “Me.” In this sense, witnessing constitutes the Lacanian “gaze”: ‘that register that locates us, and within whose confines we look at each other’ (ibid:183). As with self-harm and drug-taking, witnessing also *blurs borders*, causing outer and inner to bleed into one another. With regards to public spectacles such as Jay and Jarik’s, it is no longer good enough to talk of an outside observer peering in, rather (in the Strathernian spirit of extrospection) that outsider has inextricably *become an insider*.

Meanwhile, back in the abject theatre of *Itchy Park*, Jay has gotten down on all fours to begin licking the pavement. Looking up in between licks, he shouts: *‘I’m sleeping rough and someone has stolen my food! These are the floors I sleep on! Does that disgust you?’* Jay directs the question not just at myself and the rest of his drinking associates, but at anyone and everyone that happens to walk past, regardless of whether or not they choose to meet his gaze. Each set of eyes, averted or not, is rendered a witness unto Jay’s grotesque transformance. One is reminded here of Kristeva’s claim, that ‘it is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite’ (1982:4). Kristeva’s notion of the abject resonates deeply with the Bakhtinian grotesque, further emphasising the capacity of the grotesque/object body to transgressively slide beyond and between its own boundaries. The fleshy interiors of Jay’s mouth that are so often a part of his unruly bodily performances render the containment of his body highly ambiguous, reminding us that his corporeal borders are both open and unfixed.

As I have already argued at length, these kind of liveable “boundary collapses” are essentially written into the blacked-out body’s phenomenological DNA. Anaesthetic intoxicants then, understood hitherto as a kind of radical embodied technology,

hybridise the homeless body into a form that could well be described as cyborgian; in which normal temporal, relational and corporeal boundaries are collapsed through the grotesquery of the intoxicated transformance; where blood spills from tender lips as memory shrivels into an inaccessible husk, and where homeless tongues grip the street with a prehensile strength that forces you, the *witness*, to consider the very meaning of *disgust*. This, after all, is what the cyborg world is all about; ‘about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of...permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints’ (Haraway 1991:72).

As I hope to have demonstrated, the blacked-out body is – to borrow Holbraad and Pedersen’s (2009:51) usage of the Deleuzian term – an *intensive* act of self-transformation, one that is practiced above all in the imperceptible stretch of a hardened, memoryless present. As such, it should therefore come as no surprise that these escapist expersonations are above all performed; for performance, operating as it does at the apex of the present, intrinsically resists reproduction – it is a novel, *one-time thing* that sits in the gap between “official” and “unofficial” ontologies. Indeed, recall that in the blackout, the past dissolves as quickly as it is created, leaving nothing reproducible, nothing *archivable* behind. In Bakhtin’s terms, these transformances can thus be said to “carnivalize the present” by putting down ontological roots for a world that stands in opposition to the official world, *their own state versus the ideal state*.

Few thinkers recognised the power of these grotesque “second worlds” more astutely than Bakhtin. Indeed, his work echoes what key thinkers from performance studies have been telling social science since the inception of their discipline, specifically that performance is not explainable as either purely an artistic form or indeed a spectacle: ‘it does not generally speaking, belong to the sphere of art. It belongs to the borderline between art and life. In reality, it is life itself, but shaped according to a certain pattern of play’ (1968:7). In this way, we can take trans/performance to be in cahoots with the real by virtue of its constant and unflinching entanglement with living, breathing, hybrid bodies. Indeed, is the homeless-addicted body (once carnivalised through its grotesque hijacking of public space) not *so much more* than a spectacle that is merely “seen” by

people, but something they “live” as it unfolds? During anaesthetic time, does life not play by different rules? And what of this grey zone between art and life? Given the complex liminality of the addicted body might we, at least momentarily, consider homeless transformance, with its temporal trickery and (post)plural bodies, as a not only a form of life but also a form of art?

Negative Dialectical Body Art

In thinking about these questions, I have found Theodor Adorno’s (1990) negative dialectics to be extremely useful. For Adorno, the artist holds revolutionary potential not through the aesthetic seduction of his technical repertoire, but instead by virtue of his solitude and isolation. Adorno was committed to tearing down the “untruth” of bourgeois idealism – specifically the attempt to establish subjective identity and material (objective) reality as separate fields. In his eyes, bourgeois philosophy reified the concept of the object such that it became an ontological “given” – obscuring the socio-historical trajectories through which it had been formed. As such, Adorno claimed that the concept of “truth” can be said to possess its own specific historicity, becoming concretised in the present as an “objective situation.” The dynamic tension at the heart of his dialectical materialism, namely the collapse of subject into object, was employed by Adorno as a means of critically “demythifying” the history of the bourgeois object and by extension turning the ideological tables, such that it was now history that took its meaning from the present, rather than the other way around. Having established truth as precariously interlaced within the present, rather than solidified into the thatching of history, Adorno turned his not insignificant attention to the socio-cultural spaces in which he considered bourgeois reification to be at its weakest, where the dividing line between subject and object is not so ideologically cut-and-dry; paying special attention to *the artist*. The solitudinous artist he claimed, by placing him/herself in this semi-excluded space, allows society to doggedly colonise ‘the inmost cells of the self-enclosed technical problems, and he registers its demands all the more legitimately, the

less he is prompted from the outside, arbitrarily, and in constraint of the rule of form' (Adorno 1936:215-216)⁹¹.

In collapsing his/her subjectivity into the material conditions of his work, the artist is effectively both catalyst and substrate, debunking the bourgeois idealism that posited the split between science as "truth" and art as "illusory." The artist therefore, by standing simultaneously inside and outside of the social structure, triggers an explosive disjuncture from within the process of reification, exposing the contradictions that sustain the ideology of the present. In his eyes, the proper concern of art, so to speak, must be with the material itself, lest it lose its transformational potential for immanence – a shift in perspective that ultimately makes the artist subservient to the artwork. According to Buck-Morss (1977), the artist could best critique the social structure not through his recognition of politics, but through his *ignorance*. By isolating himself and focusing on his material, and thus sitting on the apex of history – in which the past is constituted only by its relationship to the present – his “work” begins to take on a revolutionary potential in both the cultural and political sense. As such, the revolutionary artist of Adorno’s thought has much in common with the outsider artists championed by Jean Dubuffet, their work emerging from the netherworld of their innermost creative impulses, impulses that are not shaped by the cultural mainstream. To paraphrase Deleuze (2013:316), art of this kind is a form of life unto itself, *techne* rather than *episteme*.

If outsider art arises from what Weiss (1992) calls the “shattered forms” of everyday communication, thereby rupturing established conventions (aesthetic and otherwise) from beyond the social centre, we can, I propose, align this kind of creative impulse with transcendent body techniques of society’s most abject outsiders – homeless addicts. Indeed, like the revolutionary artist, the addict does his “work” at the apex of history, in the hardened and yet fading present of the blackout. The difference between the two lies in their respective materials. For the Adornian artist, his material is the (de)reified object of his production. For homeless addicts such as Jay, his body *is* his material.

⁹¹ Cited in Buck-Morss (1977).

It is my intention, therefore, to reveal ethnographically the blacked-out addict as a radical version of the revolutionary artist of Adorno's thought; so far off the social map, such an isolationist, so fadingly present that he cannot help but simultaneously contain and negate the structure of the dominant ideology and its entangled (chrono)politics. It is, I claim, precisely through their isolation – their “failure” – that these grotesque, unworkable bodies reveal the fault-lines in late-liberalism's systemic unity. The socio-political “truth” that Adorno was seeking through the artist, I hope to show, can be also be located in the dislocation, degradation, destitution, and temporality of the blacked-out body.

As I look to table the theoretical possibility that homeless-addicted being can be seen as a form of art, I will now hold up Adorno's analysis of art against that of Deleuze, the aim being that these two somewhat divergent theoretical strands might be partially hybridised through the ethnography offered within this thesis, helping us arrive at a more nuanced understanding of the existential conditions of urban homelessness. Whilst both thinkers agree that art carries within it a certain potential, for Deleuze art is not constituted by a historically determined “pre-givenness,” as in Adorno's writings, but rather by a certain “open” transformative trajectory of “sense-making,” a *line-of-flight* through which all strata and identity are obliterated into unknown quantities. Furthermore, as discussed at the end of the previous chapter, Deleuze claimed that *it is above all art* that can supposedly rescue addiction from its own entropy. However, as Adorno's work suggests, the dividing lines between artist, material, and artwork are nothing if not blurred. With these ideas in mind, a closer look at the line-of-flight, and in particular how it relates to addiction's “crack,” will be paramount.

Tragic Lines of Flight

The line-of-flight, itself intrinsic to art's transformative power but by no means limited to it,⁹² is a prominent feature of Deleuzian thought. It marks a creative trajectory towards new "territories" of being, a radical double movement between the finite and the infinite – a leaving behind and a *becoming* something new. Critically though, Deleuze reminds that when it comes to these creative movements of becoming, we do not get something out of nothing, as it were. Meaningful transformation can occur only when we know from what we have broken free of – *from* what has been *detrterritorialised* – and *to* what has been arrived at, i.e. *reterritorialised*. Furthermore, the "value" of these winged transitions – in other words the "potential" of their *charge* – is necessarily measured in relation to what alternative becomings/transformations it might yet generate. In other words, the line-of-flight must, in Deleuze and Guattari's eyes, be capable of reconstructing the nature of the very forces that brought it into play.

When it comes to drug-use at ground level, Deleuze and Guattari (2013) ultimately argue that the assemblage between bodies and drugs is so total, so "habituating," that it fails to sustain strategic links with the social world and with subjectivity, leaving it incapable of forming new lines-of-flight. Under these conditions the "plane" of existence activated by drugs 'engenders dangers of its own, by which it is dismantled at the same time that it is constructed' (*ibid*:314); thereby thrusting the user into a downward tailspin (an "abject" reterritorialisation) towards calamity. Without these strategic links, the body is drained of all political potential, left "botched" and empty. The drug line, for them, is essentially a line-of-tragedy – what was discussed in the previous chapter as a *crack*. Recall that it is supposedly art above all else that can "extend" the crack and transform the botched line-of-tragedy into new lines-of-flight. By becoming the mimetic double of what occurs at the bodily level, art invites us to

⁹² Deleuze compares the line of flight with two other lines: first, the molar, which operates through the viciousness of binary structures. Secondly, the molecular, which operates through shape shifting and subtle displacements. The line of flight represents a clean-but-contingent break from the other two lines – this is why it cannot be evaluated in isolation from the two other lines, and thus why all three lines co-determine each other's value.

bypass the substance itself and “safely” access the experience by jumping in at the middle and fast-forwarding straight to the line-of-flight.

As far as Deleuze and Guattari are concerned then, the addict’s line, once enacted, is destined for entropy, able only to ever launch false and empty lines-of-flight; thereby conferring on the drug-body a predetermined affect, described most vividly by the authors in the death-courting image of the “downward spiral.” Given their explicit contempt for deterministic thinking, not to mention their emphasis on a “strategic” relation to the world within “concrete” social fields, this preordained, dare I suggest universal, vision of the addict seems somewhat out of place, almost downright contradictory. I therefore find myself in agreement with Peta Malins (2004) and Catherine Dale (2002), finding their “idealisation” of the *sober breakthrough* problematic, least of all from an ethnographic perspective. The problem, it seems, is that Deleuze and Guattari have over-determined the drug-body assemblage, placing disproportionate emphasis on the physical effects of drugs whilst overlooking other aspects of the drug-experience, such as: its (an)aesthetics, its corporeal sensations, its relationality, and its temporality. As Klein says of cigarettes, ‘[they] cannot be judged solely on the basis of the effects of nicotine and tars’ (1993:191).

The drug-assemblage, according to Malins (2004), is above all *rhizomatic*, insofar as it locates the drug-body within an open plane of divergent, but ultimately *non-hierarchical*, possibilities that span out in multiple directions all at once. This thesis has tried to situate the homeless-addicted body in a similarly immanent (albeit situationally restricted) field of relations, as (over)connected to bodies, time, memories, others, ghost-demons and socio-political formations that come together from many different directions at once. Indeed, as my ethnographic material has intended to show, certain drug experiences have the capacity to transform the body and its relations in ways far more complex than simply chemical; rather they can alter the way a body constitutes (and reconstitutes) itself. By deciding in advance that the addicted crack is always already on course to become a line-of-death, Deleuze and Guattari overlook the social, political, ethical and “situational” complexities of drug use. Critically, in

conceptualising drug-use through this pessimistically narrow focus – as either “habituated” or “burst” – the authors ignore the possibility that the addicted body, and more specifically those belonging to the homeless, might operate as a kind of artwork unto itself or, to modify Wagner, a *transformance that stands for itself*.

Artworks Unto Themselves

As I have argued throughout the course of this thesis, the transformative potential of psychoactive anaesthesia lies in its capacity to heave haunted bodies into the dehistoricised pantheon of the blackout. Once this grotesque expersonation is underway, boundaries of self, body, time and Other extend disjointedly and paradoxically into one another. Indeed, rather than pre-judging the way in which these substances might connect to human bodies, this thesis has taken drug addiction in *Itchy Park* to possess its own specific morals, ethics, politics, techniques and forms of (de)subjectivation. Significantly, whilst I have only just argued that Deleuze and Guattari's particular opinions on drug use are distinctly limited in their scope, this does not change the fact that the conceptual “tools” of their work – becomings, rhizomatic connectivity, bodily flows, subjective multiplicities (to name but a few) – can remain intrinsically useful with regards to ethnographically thinking through the existential realities of drug addiction amongst the homeless.

As I hope to have demonstrated through my ethnographic accounts, the blackout sparks a particular kind of ego loss, in the process creating a new ontological form that is at once invisible and undeniable, a form not unlike that of wax escaping the burning wick, rhapsodised by its newfound liquidity and yet simultaneously desperate to solidify. Indeed, is this not the daily reality endured by the waxen bodies that line the benches in *Itchy Park*: at once deterritorialised by the affective multiplicity of intoxication, and yet invariably destined to reterritorialise (sober up) the morning after? Is this not why Jimmy always keeps a spare can in his pocket for when he wakes up? He keeps the can, I posit, not out of repetition, but *continuity*: ‘to get myself sorted out, keep my head right. Otherwise I start to get really fuckin’ low, like I can’t function.’ Approached

through the Deleuzian tool box, Jimmy's desire to drink, *to function*, can be seen as part of a wider constellation of existential imperatives that are reciprocally creative and destructive, an embodied assemblage of coterminous blockages and becomings – an idea captured by Jimmy's autoanalysis on the topic of his alcoholic selfhood: the morning drink as '*the lens through which you see your own self-deterioration*.' The point, ultimately, is that bodies such as Jimmy's – even as they become “stratified” into the pathology of the addict – are nonetheless continually on the lookout for escape, for ways-of-becoming that take them out from the abject prison of their being, even if only for a little while.

At the end of the day, the artists who peaked Deleuze's interest weren't the performative bodies of London's homeless addicts, but Lowry, Fitzgerald, Michaux and Burroughs. That being said, had Deleuze reconsidered his position of ethnographic distance, he may well have found a profoundly similar attitude towards intoxication amongst London's street addicts. Like the literati that grabbed and held his attention, the homeless addicts of my own research also use drugs and alcohol to intensify their sense of being and transfigure existential crisis, not to mention radically destabilise their subjectivity on an almost daily basis. They are, I suggest, the unpublished auto-experimenters of the late-modern cityscape who, in using knife, needle and bottle to explore their wounds, throw themselves each day into a form of perspectival eclipse that embodies a particular kind of political strategy; *becoming-other*.

So, when Deleuze and Guattari talked about drug-based perception being “overlaid in advance,” they failed to consider that for the homeless, given the meagre socio-political resources available to the socially abandoned, they simply can't afford for the drug *not* to be overlaid in advance. As a ready-made way of being/becoming-in-the-world, drugs are an unrivalled existential resource for the abandoned, offering a means of escape that is forged through a necessary if potentially perverse and dangerous relationship. It is precisely from this hazard that Deleuze and Guattari emerge as sceptical of on-the-ground drug use, wary of the way in which drugs can spark an “actual” decay of the body. Indeed, they acutely stress the need to avoid organic dissolution, to *keep enough*

back to enable continuing trajectories of reformation, ‘to keep small supplies of significance and subjectification, if only to turn them against their own systems when the circumstances demand it’ (2013:186). Is this not the role of the can of lager tucked safely away in the homeless pocket, the “keeping back” of just enough?

In taking a drink on waking, addicts such as Jimmy are at once resisting and embodying the threat of their own “self-deterioration,” turning themselves against and thus responding to the dominant reality. This is how he confronts his isolation, his alienation, his boredom, his crisis-of-presence. Deleuze and Guattari might well call their response a botched job, guilty of emptying themselves ‘instead of looking for the point at which they could *patiently* and momentarily dismantle the organisation of the organs we call the organism’ (*ibid*:187) [*my emphasis*]. For many of the homeless, *patience* is experienced and endured as the deep ache of existential boredom, not enculturated through practice and self-discipline. Help comes when it comes, if at all. Remaining under these jarring conditions – “staying stratified” – really *is* the worst thing that can happen. So they roll the dice and gamble on their own survival, in the process blowing open the conventional boundaries of their socio-political strata, in full knowledge of the risk of “demented or suicidal collapse” (*ibid*).

It is imperative to remember that as the disenfranchised occupants of the interstices between social strata, the State simply does not allow the homeless the time or space to “lodge” themselves on a given stratum so that they might properly ‘experiment with the opportunities it offers’ and thus ‘find an advantageous place on it’ with which to pursue potential deterritorialisation (*ibid*). Their moments of “opportunity” are infinitely more precarious and fleeting in nature, their ‘continuum of intensities’ inevitably more narrow than for “normal” people, such that from the moment that they wake up and find themselves alive they are already ensnared within a sink-or-swim moment in which a beer, needle or pipe is as close to a ‘small plot of new land’ (*ibid*) as they may ever get.

So yes, for sure, they deterritorialise; but not from a position of disciplined patience or caution, instead they take flight through precisely what Deleuze and Guattari warn

against: *wild destratification*. If destratification is about mapping lines-of-flight that open up new possibilities from strata, then its “wild” namesake pertains to practices of absolute abandonment that do not begin from within the “strategic zone” of rooted territory, a process that risks the strata collapsing “suicidally” in on themselves. As Simon O’Sullivan puts it, ‘you need the root to produce the rhizome’ (2006:33). Crossing this threshold, *taking a walk on the wild side*, so to speak, is the difference between art and illness, warn Deleuze, Guattari and O’Sullivan alike.

And yet perhaps the homeless addict is not quite as wild as we might first assume. Perhaps his destratification is more *wily* than wild. After all, though the homeless addict exists on and through the abject border of society’s outside, his practices are derived from available materials, scarce and risky though they may be. In this sense, the body and drugs, as two sides of the same instrument, constitute a territory – a *root* – which itself makes available the possibilities of deterritorialisation. In other words, even though the homeless addict occupies a precarious perch located deep in the field of power, it is precisely through their creative techniques of escape that the same field is blown right open. This is closer to Napier’s (2004) conception of the liminal outsider as an immanent transformer of life, insofar as their dangerous position on the margin is heavy with transcendent and creative potential, a position that favours inventive strategies of existence over the culturally sterile tactics of reproduction that reside at the centre.

However, as Napier also reminds us, life on modernity’s precarious margins is hardly a cakewalk, that ‘for every Ghandi who can create the world’s largest democracy, there are thousands who die unknown’ (2004:38). Faced with this sobering reality it is tempting to think, as Deleuze has pessimistically suggested, that the addict’s line of flight never really gets off the ground, that instead it hangs in suspended animation like a mosquito in amber, ready to crack open at any moment. Again, it is art, and art alone, Deleuze keeps reminding us, that can save the drug-experience from becoming a spiral towards death. But what happens to this conclusion when the boundaries between artist and artwork start to break down, when grotesque subjects performatively blur the

subject/object relation by using their own intoxicated bodies to constitute art, when the “manageable distance” between art and addict all but collapses into itself?

Blurred Lines

According to James Weiner (2001), the transcendent power of the artwork lies in its capacity to reveal the limits of human relationality. Indeed, in a move not unlike his Heideggerian analysis of Fōi poetry in Melanesia, I am positing that the obviational bodily forms of *Itchy Park*’s homeless addicts acquire their transcendent effect by deliberately positioning themselves against the conventions of “normative” sociality. It is through this external positioning that my informants achieved ontological transformation. Indeed, as the person slips into the demonic and ghostly space-time of the blackout, their ecliptical perspectivism allows them to step outside the conventional ordering of the world as it currently stands. Thinking through this perspectival shift, Weiner’s eschewment of the opposed categories “life” and “death” in preference for the conjoined term “lifedeath” seems especially pertinent here, insofar as it enables us to conceptualise the blackout as a distinct social phenomenon that has written into its very form the *possibility of its own negation* – presence in absence and absence in presence. This bodying-forth and making visible the hidden anatomy of convention – *unconcealment* in Heidegger’s terms – is thus a process of “elicitation” insofar as it *draws forth* the concealed form of our social, historical, and political realities. Conceived as simultaneously artist and artwork, the blacked-out body does not belong to the representational or “demystified” domain of aesthetics of Western thought, belonging instead to a different interpretive frame altogether, that of *anaesthetic embodiment*. Let me now return to *Itchy Park*, where conventional categories are warped and remade on a daily basis.

Under conditions of extreme intoxication, in which the addict is simultaneously self and other, presence and absence, the person in question enters into an intimacy with the material world that actively disrupts the taken-for-granted borders between subject and object. Neuroscientist Susan Greenfield (2000) says as much when she mentions how,

after a certain amount of alcohol, for example, the reified coherence of everyday objects liquefies, such that the alcoholised body itself becomes an inextricable part of the same melting pot.

With these border disruptions in mind, consider these words from Hamish, one of the more sporadic personalities to grace *Itchy Park*:

'There's energy everywhere you see; every human being is just a mass of energy. The world around us, that's energy as well. You need to open yourself up and feel that energy. Dissolve into it. That's how we heal, by channelling energy through ourselves into others. Alcohol helps, it opens you up to the energy in the world, helps you become part of the flow.'

The liquidation of the material world into the stream of drunken experience, what Hamish describes as dissolving oneself into the flowing mass of energy, echoes the subject-object rearrangements that Adorno describes in his notion of the “exact fantasy.” This moment – itself analogous to Nietzsche’s concept of “dream” – is one in which humans relate directly to the composite textures of their very *being*, rather than through pre-given conventional structures, thus marking it out as a form of liberation from ideological bondage.

Drunkenness, as Hamish pointed out, makes the external, material world – the “energy” of being, in his terms – preeminent. By “dissolving” oneself into the flow of otherness,⁹³ the drunkard, or rather drunkenness, lets the object take the lead, as it were; offering us a window into the performative, historical, and social structure of the present that makes the external world “given” and immediate. In other words, in order to escape the bondage of his cage, Hamish – the homeless-alcoholic-subject – attempts to “break-through-to-the-other-side” by submitting himself to the object, *becoming part of the flow* and attending to the “entityness” of a world that would otherwise remain concealed and,

⁹³ i.e. the objective structures of the world – human and non-human – that constitute the permeable boundaries of the Self.

by extension, shrouded in misrecognition. Furthermore, this “immersion in particularity,” to quote Buck-Morss (1977:85-86) does ‘not lead to the subject's rediscovery of itself, but to a discovery of the social structure in a particular configuration.’ As Hamish says of his own situation:

‘Being homeless, being able to watch people as they pass through, it’s how I learned to become a healer. Becoming part of the flow, it’s exhausting sometimes though, hearing everyone’s voices....so much energy. Sometimes it becomes too much. That’s the problem nowadays, everyone’s married to capitalism. It blocks the flow of energy, so now it all just builds up. Now anyone will rob you in a heartbeat, just to get ahead. Things used to be different around here. I can’t believe how much it’s all changed now.’

For Hamish, alcohol allows him to dissolve into the flows of energy that constitute the particular form of his situation, the immersion of which attune him to the “problem” of capitalism. For Hamish then, the experience of drunkenness not only possesses diagnostic potential, it also operates as an alternative means of conceptualising the world in which he finds himself embedded. Intoxication, like art, creates alternative modes of perception; as such it can never be totally located within the subject. Rather than blindly accepting the “givenness” of the world as it stands, Hamish alcoholically “opens himself up” to its flows, as a means of self-experimentation and also existential diagnosis, dissolving himself into the objective flux of the socio-historical ether so as to “feel out” the kaleidoscopic elements that constitute the (object) world, testing out new relational arrangements until they form in a way that reveals their hidden “truth.” Heidegger wrote at length on the complexities of this hidden divide, arguing that human being emerges through the tension between the way our “unawareness” of the world-as-it-unfolds works to conceal our relationship to things, and the techniques available for exposing these assumed relationships. Any operation that brings forth the frames that reify a specific thing or entity is thus an unconcealing – a revealing of truth. In this way, we can see Hamish’s drinking as just this sort of truth-operation, as a procedure of unconcealment that allows him to diagnose the cutthroat “problem” of capitalism; namely that its ideology “blocks” the subject’s potential to collapse/flow into the object.

Furthermore, by engaging in the kind of dialectical materialism Adorno would have been proud of, Hamish marks himself out as a “healer” whose very efficacy has been forged by his tragic dislocation into homelessness and alcoholism. As he puts it: *‘it’s my job as a healer to unlock people from their concrete boxes. Whatever the cost.’*

Hamish’s testimony reveals how the intoxicated escape from the “givenness” of the material world involves a creative reconfiguration of the real and the imaginary. As formerly concrete objects dissolve into the flow of alcoholic sensation, Hamish is effectively taking part in what Walter Benjamin (1996) called “speculative experience,” an emergent form of life that enables him to stretch the elastic limit of his imagination into new terrains, thereby connecting him to the magical and spiritual language of things. This, to borrow a term from Gunther Anders (1989), is the stuff of “moral fantasy” – an imaginative means of opening body and soul to the immanent, synthetic unity of life; what Aldous Huxley called “Mind at Large.” Capitalism, according to Hamish, imposes a filter on reality that blunts the speculative imagination and thus conceals the world’s intrinsic immanence. To operate as a means of embodied escape, alcohol works by partially removing this filter, kick-starting certain speculative figurations that have the power to transport the drinker into alternative experiential arenas. It is this deep connection with the transcendent power of the imaginary that give psychoactive substances the power to construct and materialise new forms of experience; experiences that sit outside ideological conventions of subject and object.

By virtue of their occupation of public space, homeless alcoholics such as Hamish exist on the unstable boundary between escape and representation. As a creative act of subversion, his drinking, I claim, not only challenges the daily policing of “the real,” it also throws into question and problematizes the very conditions in which subjectivity is produced. In forging a new temporality and thus a new relationship with the world, Hamish effectively politicises his alcoholism. It is a betrayal of convention that is embodied and performed at the level of the everyday, a rejection of representation in favour of magical alternatives. For Hamish and his fellow drinkers and drug-takers of *Itchy Park*, these transcendent subversions occur within the belly of the beast as it were,

right in the heart of the dominant moral and political order. Accordingly, their escapist techniques operate within these representations whilst simultaneously exceeding and negating them.

The border liquefaction of blacking-out constitutes the most radical of these subversions, an ontology unto itself that brings into play a mode-of-being that sits outside and below representations, dissolving convention as it materialises into existence. There is an Ouroboros-like quality to the blackout, a moment when everyday life twists back on itself, when time begins to eat its own tail, transforming and negating the very regimes – the clinic, the courts – that purport to control and define it. In this sense, the grotesque and subversive form of the blackout is, to quote Bakhtin, a ‘play without a stage’ within which the normative boundaries of everyday life are collapsed into themselves, inverted and mocked. In accordance with Papadopoulos’ (2008) notion of imperceptible politics, we can conceive the blackout as “objectless” – ‘that is it performs political transformation without targeting a specific political aim.’ Infinitely more protean than protest, the blackout does not make any particular claim, civic or otherwise, for a place within the polis, pursuing political action via the backdoor instead, through radical affective and perspectival transformations. In this sense, the object of its political action is the action itself. Under these conditions, in which a person’s agency is eclipsed and subjective consciousness finds itself caught in its own opaque snare, the political form of the blackout can thus also be described as non-intentional. This is what separates the placard-wielding activist and the blacked-out addict; where the former strives to change the world the latter strives instead to change themselves. As I hope to have demonstrated, the addict initiates this change through a contingent and risky process of embodied transformation; transformations that can only be categorised as political in hindsight.

So, if the blackout speaks any kind of political language, it is the language of the body, of sensation. Ultimately, this is a contingent, material and immanent language; spoken by bodies that operate outside the body of society. It is for this reason that the blackout, and by extension homeless-addiction, unsettles the prevailing fantasy of a bounded,

cohesive, impermeable body. Consequently, the escapist trajectories of the blacked-out body must always contend with the totalising, “objectivist” trajectories that constitute the dominant order, the principle aim of which are to securely fasten the body’s immanent potential to orthodox, conventional representations of experience (Essig 1998). As a result, the homeless-addicted body is forced to continually reinvent itself at the same time as it is dominated. In this sense, the “ethics of escape” explored in the previous chapter are inseparable from the political formations that they set into motion. In what remains of this thesis, I focus on the pivot that connects the ethical with the political; the body.

En Garde

The body is always much more than just a metaphor, rather it is a transitional container that sets the dynamic boundary between self and other, subject and object. Amongst the protagonists of *Itchy Park*, the bodily skin – the “psychic envelope” – is forever on the verge of puncture. Whether these perforations occur through blade or needle, the fact of the matter is that the addicted body remains an open and grotesque body; *open mouths, open skin, open lungs*. As has already been demonstrated, is through the ritualised puncturing of these bodily boundaries with drugs that the addict comes to identify with his tragic losses as simultaneously related to and severed from the self. Indeed, it is the haunting echoes of these losses, coming from every direction, that gradually worm their way into his being, eventually snatching up his body and memory, thereby forcing him to live as an expersonate absence.

As revealed by Hamish’s description of drunken experience, it is during intense periods of intoxication that the normally reified boundary between subject-object can be said to collapse into itself. The body then, is not only the material on which the addict does his work, *it is* the work. By engaging with certain strands of Deleuze and Adorno’s thought, I have so far tabled the possibility that the dissociative form of the blackout might be understood as a kind of performance art unto itself. Having also established the blackout as a kind of possession trance, we might recall here Napier’s (1992:69) description of

Balinese possession as an ‘avant-garde activity,’ insofar as those entranced are empowered to push themselves towards and beyond what can be known, the idea being to return changed, but unharmed. Critically, it is the encompassing presence of the group that protects the individual trancer from harm. In this sense, the performance is distributed across the group, creating a dynamic and contingent engagement between the trancer and his contiguous relational field. Holding the Balinese trance ritual in opposition to Western performance art, Napier notes how in the absence of a protective group, the risk of harm skyrockets. One need only recall Chris Burden’s infamous exit wound that occurred in *Shoot* to acknowledge that Western performance art has a tendency to ‘leave wounded bodies in the human world’ (*ibid*). From Napier’s perspective, the obsession with self-immolation that has historically accompanied much of Western body-art is part of a wider cultural obsession with individuality and recognition. Radical though these acts of self-mutilation may be, they are, Napier argues, fundamentally lacking in transformational power: ‘what lives on is not the individual performer, but a name that is added to a long list of heroes of the institution appearing on a new kind of monument, one that glorifies the institution through self-sacrifice...artists have sacrificed who they are for how they are known’ (*ibid*:22). In short, without creative transformations of self, there can be no such thing as avant-garde activity.

Napier argues that truly avant-garde art would have to disrupt our sense of individuality, not enhance it. The avant-garde, he claims, must come instead from the position of anonymity (something expected in “primitive” art) – a position at once unacceptable and undesirable to Western artists. In other words, we must first lose ourselves if we are to creatively transform ourselves. On the back of these ideas, Napier thus compares the power of “true” avant-garde art to that of ritual, insofar as both are in the business of deindividuating the subject through dissociative processes that deliberately re-create the self. As has already been discussed in chapter three, the individualising trajectory of Western thought and culture has overseen the general collapse of dissociative ritual structures, thereby leaving the body (and particularly the homeless body) stranded and forced to work on/perform by itself. Indeed, if Napier is correct when he claims the

construction of personhood to be a “sociosomatic” phenomenon, then perhaps the reason we find so many “wounded” bodies scattered across the modern cityscape is that in the collective absence of the “socio” people have been forced to get way too “somatic.”

There are few groups more somatic than the urban homeless, and even fewer more in need of social connection. It is this fundamental imbalance, I claim, that causes the homeless to twist their bodies inside-out and re-invent their selves through dissociative temporality of drugs and alcohol. Unlike the self-immolating artists who engrave their names into art world’s monument of recognition, the homeless could not be more anonymous, least of all in the blackout, when they completely forget themselves.⁹⁴ Even though the culture at large tends to represent these ego-loss excursions as pathological, the fact of the matter is that the blackout remains a creative means of escaping the limits of the self, even if such changes rarely leave the person unharmed. As an alternative mode of being-in-the-world, the blackout is, I claim, an “artistic” form of escape, one that forges new forms of meaning from within the heart of the dominant aesthetic. It is, the avant-garde sense of things, a body – and a being – that goes beyond itself.

In the next section, I will concern myself with the broader sense of how the avant-garde temporality of the blackout – now theorised as a work of art unto itself – works as a social and political practice. As simultaneously artist and artwork, presence and absence, subject and object, the grotesque bodies that make up these pages can, I claim, act as ontological critiques of binary-driven political liberalism. It is at this juncture then, that I will start to evaluate intoxicated transformance not just as art, but as political body art.

To Be (Conscious) Or Not To Be (Conscious): Forgetting the Question

I have thus far claimed that encompassed within the homeless-addicted body is a reciprocal ambivalence between creation and destruction, cracking and becoming, subjectivation and a/objectivation, deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation; an

⁹⁴ If the “famous” body-artist can be described as relentlessly throwing themselves onto the altar of self, the “anonymous” homeless throws themselves onto the altar of Other.

ambivalence that is performed through the eversion of the normative temporal structure (along with the relational frameworks that simultaneously underpin it). While the normative body (the “ideal type,” so to speak) of the late-liberal self is closed, inward-facing, cohesive, hyper-individualistic and private, the homeless-addicted body is invariably rendered as abnormal, open, public, bestial, abject and grotesque. As such, when a person becomes somebody else through drugs, we can approach this possession in terms of what Bakhtin calls the “protrusion” of the grotesque body – *the inside coming out*. Like the single surface of a Klein bottle that is at once inside and outside of itself, the blacked-out body is constituted by the protrusion of the inside into the outside and vice versa.

Indeed, as I hope to have shown, when under the influence of drugs, past and present are continuously spilling over into one another, creating the kind of schizoid temporality that subverts the “idealised” linear temporality of the “workable” late-liberal body. As the embodied eversion of the dominant chronopolitics, the blacked-out body can perhaps be understood, in Bakhtinian terms, as a walking, talking *political orifice* – the capitalist ethos turned grotesquely inside-out. Indeed, is the orifice not an immediate cousin of the Klein bottle, insofar as *seeing out of it is at once seeing into it*? What, then, are the forms, and indeed the conditions, of this chronopolitical eversion?

In intoxicated arenas such as *Itchy Park*, consciousness, to borrow a phrase from Nicolas de Warren (2010:291), not only ‘abstains from its own interests,’ but stands in antidotal opposition to the disciplinary chronopolitics of modern life itself. The park is, as Jimmy says, ‘*chaos and comedy all rolled into one*.’ The chaos builds steadily throughout the day, gaining a psychoactive momentum that transforms a few benches into what is, as I have argued thus far, a space of moral torment unto itself; a capricious and unstable relational and existential space in which the homeless narcotically work on their bodies as a means of partially extricating themselves from the chronic crisis that underpins the majority of their everyday lives.

In the previous section, I suggested that the homeless addict is involved in a kind of “negative dialectical body art” that, through the collapsing of subjectivity into objectivity, simultaneously performs and transforms the stark conditions of their alterity. If it is true, as Deleuze posits, that the key condition in the generation of art is absolute risk, then surely the street addict meets the criteria. In consuming 15-20 cans of super-strength cider over the course of a single drinking session, people such as Jay are literally risking their lives on an almost daily basis. Keeping their ideas close to hand, I will now delve deeper into the ways in which the *Itchy Park*’s addicts can be seen as political body artists.

Consider this quote from Robert:

‘The world is moving too fast. All this out there (gesturing to the park and in particular to the people walking through it) none of this is real, it’s all an illusion. Nature, those buildings, those are real, not this life, this shit. That’s why I drink, to feel more real. To be conscious or not to be conscious, that is the question.’

Robert is chronically homeless, drinks heavily and smokes cannabis almost every day and has done so for the last thirty years. Despite this way of life in conjunction with the recent emergence of throat cancer he has a remarkable vitality about him, exemplified in the omnipresent red rose he keeps in the top pocket of his off-white blazer, his antique walking stick, and the fact that I have never seen him with his sunglasses off, regardless of the weather. The world, as he puts it, is “too fast.” How does he cope? By drinking and putting himself into anaesthetic “time out” zones, in which the colossal onrush of an objective future is slowed to a snail’s pace, reduced down into the manageable form of his favoured chemical substance and the temporal sensations it creates. Through these body techniques Robert is able to temporarily alleviate the menace of his own presence, flexing the boundaries of his selfhood against the limits of the non-conscious which, through the embodied distortion of time, offers him some form of relief from the steroidal realities of the everyday. Robert’s words, much to my regular delight, often err on the side of the poetic. For reasons that will soon become clear, his particular re-

jigging of the old Hamletian soliloquy really stuck with me. This quote stuck with me because it inadvertently threw into the open a classic existential dilemma, namely under what conditions, states and situations can human beings produce themselves politically?

Inspired by Robert's tweak on Hamlet, I feel obliged to offer something of a twist myself. Both Hamlet and Robert's questions ("to be [conscious] or not to be [conscious]?") are, as far as I can see, verging on a binary choice – the same distinction that proponents of the disease model of addiction work off, namely that the human subject is either in one of two states; intoxicated or sober, insane or lucid, predisposed or free to choose. A more interesting way of putting the question might be: *How to be simultaneously conscious and not conscious?* Rather than seeing the world as real/illusionary, inside/outside, past/present, wakeful/catatonic, subject/object, and indeed self/Other, what might it look when these oppositions are dialogically entangled and collapsed into one another?⁹⁵ Jay and Hamish have, among others, already offered an ethnographic window into these questions, demonstrating the forms life can take when the conventional oppositions that sustain late-liberalism are collapsed into one another. Thus far these vignettes have been filtered through the lens of the cyborg, the aim being to to think through, and past, the supposedly contradictory oppositions on which the late-liberal self has been constructed, allowing blacked-out subject-objects such as Jay to occupy the "third space" of Haraway's (1990) thought – a position that resists dualistic encompassment.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ It should be noted that the Surrealists had already begun asking these questions some time ago, most notably through Salvador Dali's "paranoid-critical method." Dali's method involved the artist inducing in himself the simulation of mental disease, in particular the "paranoid state," in which the self is perceived to be under attack from outside forces. If brought under suitable control, the painter will act and think as if suffering from a paranoid psychic disorder, whilst simultaneously remaining critically aware. By undermining the rational from within the position of rationality, the painter is able to set into motion a controlled deconstruction of subjective identity. This deconstruction is effectively caught up in the artwork itself, in the process revealing the world to be in a continuous state of flux, in which objects are not fixed, but rather continually morph from one state into another.

⁹⁶ It should be noted that homeless addiction is just one phenomenon among many in Western society that disrupt these tidy oppositions, that Cartesian influenced "dualism" is more a pervasive ideological blueprint than it is a hard-coding of ontology. Indeed, if Westerners really were the die-hard dualists of the anthropological imagination, we would be unable to make sense of a diverse range of human phenomena; from drag shows, sex reassignment operations, yoga practices, cosmetic surgery to body building, to name but a select few. Laidlaw (2013) staunchly warns against parading this convenient "caricature" of the West as the "real deal," so to speak. In doing so we risk distilling the world into two discrete ontological types: a Cartesian "West" and its satellite states versus a romanticised non-dualist

Dualism: A Quick Aside

Before pressing on and further investigating the social, political and temporal form of these “third spaces,” I offer a brief aside; namely to reinforce that the cyborgian analysis of homeless addiction offered in this chapter does not possess an ideological *telos* as such. This project does not represent an attempt to resolve the “subject/object problem,” rather my intention is to contextualise the limit of dualistic or “conventional” thinking within this particular ethnographic space, and bring to light its constitution as a “problem” at a social and political level. This is why I have employed the use of obviational sequences throughout this thesis, to twist figure-ground reversal in on itself, thus opening up the possibility of alternative bodily forms whilst at the same time concentrating the focus onto specific conventional associations. In this way, the sequences offer us a lens which, rather than simply accepting two-dimensional philosophical categories and imposing them on a given place and time, actually explores the *three-dimensional* ways in which human beings shape themselves in the light of certain ideals along with the divergent practices and forms that emerge from these decisions. As Weiner succinctly puts it, the unfolding of an obviation sequence ‘does not so much provide an interpretation as make visible the alternative images opened up by the interpretational procedure itself’ (2001:58).

So, when Haraway tells us that the cyborg, by obviating the dualism of Western thought through its intrinsic hybridity and partial connections, is ‘not subject to Foucault’s biopolitics’ (1990:205) but rather it actually *stimulates* politics, it would seem inexcusably flippant for anthropology not to take such claims seriously. Indeed, if what Haraway is saying is valid, then a cyborgian approach to the particular “mode of self” that constitutes the blacked-out body is truly indispensable, insofar as it actively challenges the exclusive inclusion of the homeless addict’s bare life. As simultaneously subject and object, the blacked-out body cleaves open a new vision of the world, an alternative reality of the social world’s (im)mortal flesh. In this sense, whilst the

“Rest” (Scott 2011). In other words, whilst dualism is an ideal, it is ultimately one that we have failed to live up to. As Latour (1993) quips, “we have never been modern.”

addicted body remains a precarious remainder, it is no longer “expendable” in the Agambian sense of bare life, rather it is at once “unfinalizable” and transformative; a “border-being” that ‘gives us our politics’ (*ibid*:191). We can, I think, rearticulate this idea in the form of a question, albeit one effectively already made by Viveiros de Castro, namely: under what conditions might we allow alterity to spark an alteration? At a time when more and more people are falling through the cracks, the cyborgian lens obliges itself to form part of critical ethnography, part of what Pinney calls ‘a critical anthropology for the current state of emergency’ (2011:356).

With these ideas in mind, let us put this aside to one side and return again to *Itchy Park*, freshly alert to a form of body politics in which boundary crossing and boundary dissolution occur simultaneously, a narcotic cauldron wherein possibilities-for-being are forged through a terrible intimacy within which oppositions belong to each other.

Escaping the Illusion

Trent has spent the morning trying to flog a pair of old trainers scavenged over the course of his regular nomadic wanderings. Marketing them as ‘*brand spanking new, top of the line Adidas trainers*’ he works his way around the group, each time offering an ever more nuanced sales pitch. Unfortunately for Trent, the only thing *Adidas* in sight is the cardboard box he tries to pass off as the official packaging, the trainers themselves borne of a markedly different and less desirable brand, as well as being a long way from brand spanking new. Drunk and high throughout, Trent quickly finds himself playing the gallant Prince, making Cinderellas of all his possible customers, applying the same dirty trainer to each prospective foot with all the delicacy and pageantry intrinsic to the fated glass slipper. Unfortunately for Trent, there was to be no *Disney* moment that morning. Indeed, despite his best efforts and increasing openness to haggling, his wares appeared destined to remain unpeddled. With the beauty of the ball seemingly nowhere in sight, Trent tries the trainers on himself, straining to squeeze his feet into what is clearly too small a space. Noticing his luckless endeavours, Robert hurls some choice words of ridicule in Trent’s direction, prompting the formerly gallant Prince to come

storming towards him, beer in hand, one foot comically shoeless. As Trent threatens to assault him for his insensitive comments, Robert merely dances around, his bodily rhythm echoing the smooth, continuous flowing movements of the fox-trot. As Robert snaps his fingers to a four-count, his would-be assailant follows him around, matching his gait whilst delivering highly stylised mock punches. Before long it is unclear as to who is the pugilist and who the dancer. Swigging from their cans of lager, their respective cigarettes dangling from their lips like a reptilian tongues, Robert and Trent tread water around each other for some time, their intoxicated heterotopia a performative backdrop against which the afternoon takes shape. As the decibel level starts to rise, bodily fluids are cast out against bins and trees, vitriolic arguments break out over pocket change that are just as quickly replaced with raucous laughter as people take it turns to shuffle over to the off-licence or go round the corner to score. We are given a wide berth. The “chaos” builds steadily throughout the day, transforming this slither of urban space into what is a grotesque and dystopic political spectacle unto itself.

Not long after he and Trent are finally disentangled from each other, I sit with Robert as he rattles off some spoken word poetry:

*Take it one step at a time,
Let your survival instinct kick in,
Illusion of this world,
Nine to Five,
Just to stay alive.*

I ask Robert if he takes drugs as part of this “survival instinct,” to which he replies: *‘When you’re drinking, taking drugs, when you’re “in it” - it is a world. There is no stress, no sorrow, Nothing at all. No time to think about anything else.’* I probe further with regards to his sense of time when he’s on drugs, and in particular how it relates to what he describes as the “9-5 illusion”:

I don't want to plan, I don't want discuss, I just want to take myself completely out of it, to escape the illusion.'

What Robert describes as the “illusion” I understand as the normative economic and temporal structures of late-liberalism. Anaesthetically intoxicating yourself thus provides an embodied “escape” from the reflective self-monitoring and strategic planning that constitutes these structures. How do we make sense of Robert’s escapist desire for an anaesthetic existence? To what extent is the illusion actually escapable? From what political contexts do these demands emerge?

Recalling Robert’s Hamlet-inspired analysis of the world as it stands, we see a clear divide between what is perceived as the breakneck speed of modern living (along with its conjoined “illusory” structures) and the cultivation of manageable reality. This seemingly irreconcilable tension is mediated through the ingestion of perspective-altering intoxicants, the *telos* being to “feel more real” whilst simultaneously feeling nothing at all. Robert’s existential dilemma echoes certain conclusions drawn by Buck-Morss and Benjamin, namely that the constitution of the human sensorium in late-modernity is typified by the struggle to cope with what Heyes calls “synaesthetic overload” (2014:2). In Buck-Morss’ account, these steroidal conditions have sparked a polarity reversal in the synaesthetic system⁹⁷ such that now, ‘its goal is to numb the organism, to deaden the senses, to repress memory: the cognitive system has become, rather, one of *anaesthetics*’ (1992:18). Robert’s question, therefore – *to be conscious or not to be conscious?* – can perhaps be imagined as constituting the narrow neck between two ends of an ever-rotating hourglass, in which the synaesthetic overload of modern experience trickles down through the question’s passage until it has been anaesthetically negated, only to come roaring back the moment the substance in question wears off (summed up earlier in the thesis as *waking up alive*).

⁹⁷ This expression, coined by Buck-Morss, “opens up” the nervous system, so to speak. Her point is that the human sensorium is not isolable to a particular section of the body, but rather is part of a system that mediates the human subject’s enmeshment in a world that he/she already always finds him/herself in.

To evoke a genetic analogy, Robert's question can be seen as the binding agent that connects this aesthetic shock with its complementary base pair: the ever-increasing "technologies of anaesthesia." At street level alone, the sheer array of psychotropic anaesthetics is startling to say the least: opiates, ether, cannabis, alcohol, methylated spirit, sleeping pills, spice, solvents, benzos. The point is that the synaesthetic overload and its corollary technologies of anaesthesia co-constitute one another's boundaries, leaving socio-politically disenfranchised people such as Robert to hover precariously at this narrow co-boundary point, disillusioned with reality whilst simultaneously unable to claim it with any kind of permanence beyond the duration of his self-inflicted "time-out" periods. In this sense, Robert's Hamletian question is ultimately a trick one; for under the shock(ing) conditions of modernity, in which anaesthetic technologies are ever more central in people's daily lives (for the homeless more so than any), consciousness and non-consciousness are forever crossing over and extending into one another. As with most trick questions, the primary temptation is simply to refuse its answering. In this case however, such a refusal would be short-sighted, unforgivably diverting attention from the very conditions of existence that constitute the forms of life this thesis has set out to describe. To guard against this anopsic possibility, I wish to explore what might be described as *the art of anaesthesia*.

Orlan and the Art of Anaesthesia

In this section I explore whether we might fruitfully compare the "black hole" (an)aesthetics of addiction analysed thus far with Orlan; a radical performance-artist who is famous for undergoing cosmetic surgery as a means of transforming her body into a work of art. As I have already argued, the blackout – understood as a dissociative, almost avant-garde, technique of the and self – has the power to transfigure the body simultaneously into artist and artwork. At one level then, Orlan's surgeries and the homeless addict's narcotic self-operations are mirror images of one another. On another level, however, they are quite different, opposites even; in relation to agency at least. Indeed, Meredith Jones (2008) reminds us that Orlan remains very much conscious of proceedings during her surgeries, choreographing the whole spectacle as it were, making

visible the limits of the feminist medical self by problematising her own deeply gendered body (Augsburg 1998). If Orlan's choreography hinges on the aesthetic, then the ghostly oblivion of the blackout is surely its anaesthetic mirror. Indeed, perhaps the blacked-out body is closer to the body that Jones holds up *against* Orlan's – namely that of Lolo Ferrari, the French porn star who devoted her life to the transformative and “enchanted” slumber of cosmetic anaesthesia.⁹⁸ Held up as the “anti-feminist,” Ferrari's body is analysed by Jones (among other feminist scholars) as a site of passive surrender, her adoration of anaesthetic deemed culturally abhorrent. The similarities between the homeless-addicted body and Ferrari's do not stop there, insofar as both have been historically rendered as an object of revulsion, mockery, or pity. Critically, however, whilst Ferrari's “black hole” and that of the blacked-out body are both constituted by the handing over of agency to “somebody else,” they differ markedly in form. Where Ferrari slips passively into the “time out” of chemically induced “sleep,” the addict actively “lets go” of themselves through the dissociative power of narcotic possession. For Ferrari, the transformation emerges through a completely external presence, whereas for the possessed addict it comes through the simultaneous eversion of inside *and* outside – of ghostly forces worming into via narcotics and transforming their very being. In spite of what separates them, I find myself in firm agreement with Heyes' analysis of Ferrari, as ‘someone who took extreme risks with her life and body, engaging in the limit-experiences of general anaesthesia and powerful narcotics, *practicing self-transformation of the most dramatic kind, and making herself into a transgressive work of art*’ (2014:3-4) [my emphasis].

In much the same way that there is a pre and post-operative surgical body, the homeless body can also be seen as existing on the threshold between a Before and an (ongoing) After.⁹⁹ Furthermore, as has been demonstrated by the ever-changing polytemporality of the homeless-addicted condition, the Before and the After are should not be understood

⁹⁸ Ferrari was famous for undergoing between 18 and 25 surgical enhancements over the course of her life, mostly to enlarge her breasts. A tragic figure who died under suspicious circumstances, Ferrari's implants were the biggest in the world, earning her a place in the *1999 Guinness Book of World Records*. For a more detailed analysis see Jones (2008).

⁹⁹ After all, in London at least, only in very rare circumstances is someone “born into” homelessness per se (even though under certain conditions a person's social destiny can certainly feel as such).

two ends of a linear progression, but rather as the double-sided surface of a Moebius ribbon, to the extent that each side can be seen as always already collapsing into the other, forever transforming the persons trapped within its folds. The ongoing After of homelessness, then, is a highly politicised temporal frame, to the extent that it operates as a distinctive countersite to the normative world that created it, a space that is at once a reflection and an inversion of said world.¹⁰⁰

Being in the Regime of Time

At the heart of these countersites is their intrinsic potentiality, of the possibility that new forms of life might emerge. However, as Agamben notes, the potential “to be” is always weighed against the potential *to not be*. Indeed, along with Foucault and other thinkers (Greco 2005; Rabinow 1996; Rose 1996) Agamben notes that we have entered a historical period in which the state is now ideologically committed to systematically controlling and regulating the field of life; that is to say both the bodily and everyday facets of human experience. These “actual” (rather than potential) forces put specific political and material pressures on countersitual spaces of existence, continually testing their capacity to persevere in the face of hegemony. Furthermore, if the object of regulatory control is the domain of human experience, we cannot exclude temporal experience. It is for this reason that I will now explore time, or rather the organisation and management of time into “productive” units, as a regime of control; one that is subverted through the anaesthesia of the blackout.

Human experience is, as intimated in previous chapters, fundamentally durative. In this sense, to discretely “plot” a person’s experience onto the staggered form of a timeline is to betray the lived chronology of experience. Nevertheless, “artificial” regimes of time do precisely this, employing a linear representation of time that establishes not only how people move through time, but also what they do with it. Indeed, in their extension of Weber’s classic thesis, Stephenson and Papadopoulos (2006) argue that it is above all the management of time that defines the capitalist ethic of productivity, and by

¹⁰⁰ What the late conceptual artist Robert Smithson called “non-sites.”

extension the subjectivity of the worker. In this way, how much time one has (be it too much or not enough) becomes an explicitly political statement; one that speaks to the deep tension between the embodied experience of time and the representation of time as a space for work. Furthermore, as the welfare system is increasingly eroded in the name of fiscal probity (Harvey 2007), life, and indeed employment, has become altogether more precarious. Where before the future had something of a guarantee placed upon it, now it must be “earned” through the daily rigors of the “entrepreneurial” spirit (Casas-Cortés 2014; Moore and Robinson 2015; Standing 2014).

With employment contracts increasingly worth less than the paper they’re printed on, we have entered into what Papadopoulos and Tsianos (2006) have called “post-contractual dependency,” in which the individual’s “skillset” in the present must be continually adjusted and enhanced so as to remain compatible with the ever-changing demands of the market. This is what the authors mean when they say that ‘the future is already exploited in the present’ (*ibid*:233). As the most chronically unemployed and least “productive” of the population the homeless are unable to produce a market value (all take and no give), thereby becoming enclosed between the interstitial brackets of late-liberal politics – suspended in a kind of material and social limbo that lies beyond chronocratic convention.

The blackout constitutes an exit from this chronology. This escape from linear or “productive” time is not predetermined, but a contingent and explosive break. In turning their backs on the normative timeline, these alternative temporal beings engage in what Theunissen (1991) calls the “tarrying” of time.¹⁰¹ To tarry with time is to carve out a space where subjectivity is no longer encompassed by productivity. In this sense, tarrying throws a spanner into the linear engine of the chronopolitical regime. As I have already discussed, tarrying with time, especially through blacking-out, is both objectless and non-intentional; it is a form of radical escape that betrays both regulation and representation. In this sense, psychoactively tarrying with time is one of the most powerful means through which to challenge the logic of the market, imploding the

¹⁰¹ Cited in Penta (1993).

taken-for-granted imperative that “time is money.” According to Weeks (2011) this rearticulation of “time as money” has historically held important implications for the principle of productivity, effectively functioning as a means of social control within an already saturated employment market. In this sense, keeping time (rather than killing it) is intrinsically tied to the disciplinisation of the self, often to the extent that any kind of dilatory conduct is quickly reconceived as a kind of personal failure, or, more acutely, *failing as a person*. How people keep time, or more specifically how they keep a certain tempo, is thus a question of ethics.

Indeed, the more time I spent in the field, the more I realised that the drug-addled temporality of the intoxicated body is fundamentally incommensurable with (post)disciplinary¹⁰² time of late-liberalism. In Marxist terms, late-liberal temporality has inscribed time with both a use and an exchange value. By holding certain “uses” of time against other uses, time (or specifically its use in relation to output value) becomes inextricably locked into the capitalist system. In this way, the manner in which a person “spends” (or transfers) their time becomes part of wider judgments about the value of certain activities/projects over others. The commodification of time in this way simultaneously endows it with a moral voltage; one that the homeless of *Itchy Park* continually found themselves on the wrong side of.

Time After Discipline

At the core of these ideas is the tricky relationship between agency and discipline, and in particular how this tension manifests itself politically through the temporality of intoxicated escape. It is for this reason that this project has taken as one its core themes the (an)aesthetics of homeless-addicted existence; in particular how this relates to the questions of (non)productivity and lived duration. Ultimately, I am positing that the

¹⁰² The “post” suffix refers to the distinct ways in which discipline has morphed under late-liberalism, in particular how hyper-fluid forms of self-surveillance have modified previous regimes and temporalities of discipline (and their intrinsic technologies of power) into altogether more protean and “ultrarapid” assemblages of social control (Deleuze 1992)

homeless proclivity for drug-induced “black holes” corresponds to the “actively blind” withdrawal from a particular economy of time – *futurity*.

In this sense, psychoactively messing with time via blacking-out does is not about claiming some alternative vision on the future, rather it entails the creation of an expanded, bracketed present – hard as granite and thin as silk – predicated on ghostly relations that set into motion alternative ways of being-in-the-world; ways that sit outside the future’s oppressive and alienating shadow. At the end of the day, if time is rendered valuable by its accumulation in relation to an ever-investable future, then time spent “doing nothing” (let alone doing drugs) is as good as wasted – money (and self) down the drain, as it were. In other words, the proper use of time is synonymous with the cultivation of proper selfhood; throw in the “wrong” type of consumerism¹⁰³ (or indeed the wrong tempo), viz. drugs and you have yourself quite the “improper” – and thus *immoral* – mess.

So, with the market as the principle moral guide to human conduct (both in the economic and temporal sense of things), other forms of “work” that do not fetch a delineated price are rendered either illegitimate or suspect, left to rot at the bottom of the political totem pole, so to speak. What we are confronted then, is an awkward and downright messy overlap between the ethics of escape that reside at the heart of this thesis and the self-making agency of the “entrepreneurial self” extolled through the politico-economic ideologies of late-liberalism. For the urban homeless, this messy overlap is constituted by the sheer vacuity and back-handedness of the liberal sales pitch, in which they are implored to “work (on themselves) harder” (to drag themselves up by their own bootstraps and ultimately embrace the commodification of their bodies) whilst all the while remaining socially, politically and morally abjectified through the disciplinary governmentality of exclusive inclusion. The key point, it seems, is that none of this particular kind of tyranny would be possible if it wasn’t for the specific way that

¹⁰³ For a visceral account of the “wrong” type of consumption, see Lars Eighner’s personal account of “Dumpster Diving” as strategic scavenging; an experience that evokes the creative bricolage of the hunter gatherer: ‘The diver, after all, has the last laugh. He is finding all manner of things which are his for the taking. Those who disparage his profession are the fools, not he’ (1991:8).

late-liberal capitalism orders time, for the way that it uses time to discipline bodies, to divide them into productive and non-productive. In this world, where time and money are in effect a single and unified currency, the following questions emerge: how do people on the wrong side of the market's logic handle their nonadmission and, furthermore, what form do their politics take? It is my hope that this thesis has gone some way to answering these particular questions.

Indeed, as I hope to have demonstrated, the excessive consumption of drugs sparks a radical temporal shift in which the linearity of punctuated time is both turned on its head and twisted inside-out. No longer available for "productive" use, time is instead *killed* through what Georges Bataille might call acts of "profitless expenditure" or what Roach (1996) calls the *performance of waste*. The performance of waste, what I have more acutely articulated as the transformance of *being wasted*, subverts the anxieties produced by synaesthetic overload by stepping at once out of time and body. It is through this ghostly expersonation that the addict is able to neutralise the double paralysis of deep boredom and tragic loss, in the process negating the exhausting regime of time so intimately woven into the late-liberal sales pitch. In this sense, the blacked-out bodies of *Itchy Park* are simultaneously black-market bodies, constituted through a different experience/economy of lived duration, in which time and agency move on behind the subject's back.

In the black-market economy of the blackout, there is no projection toward a future, no nervous sense of ongoing anticipation; just the dissociative drift of anaesthetic possession, of a body politically activated by the grotesque "time-out" of intoxication. Intractably present, the blackout is at once immanent and negating. This then, is political action from the absent core of a self, an actively blind way-of-being which implodes the dominant regime of time whilst simultaneously challenging what it means to be a subject. Indeed, as I hope to shown, once a person has *become somebody else*, subjective experience is no longer grist for the future's mill. The exhaustion of living within society's brackets is thus subsumed into addiction's perspectival alterity, through which a grotesque alteration of self is set in motion. Under these conditions, the plans or

discussions that are so anathema to Robert and his fellow drug-users are no longer in play. Any larger sense of the “nine to five illusion” recedes deep into the background until it is no longer visible or even tangible. In this sense, the turning inside-out of agency and the temporal distortion brought about by drugs constitute the boundaries between consciousness and non-, itself marked through the radical suspension of time: the ultimate abeyance from discipline.

Under the current chronopolitical regime, there really is no time for the present. The disciplinisation of time into infinitely divisible (and thus infinitely exploitable) units ensures that (as things currently stand) it is always the future’s gravitational pull that drags us forward. Everything in its wake is *just history*, as they say. Drug-fuelled escape profoundly disrupts this particular process; the proverbial fly in the ointment of irreversible progress. This does not make addicts role models, nor is this thesis part of a wider endorsement for us all to smash our watches on the nearest sharp corner and prolapse into the brutal and risky spaces of drug-induced anaesthesia. We should not easily forget that these technologies are built from quicksand, as much a prison as an escape. To drink, smoke and inject one’s way out of (and into) existence, as so many in these pages do, is ultimately a means of living as an absence rather than a new way of being present.

The point, I think, is that tragic loss of this complexity is not simply felt and absorbed, but also lived, continuously; a millstone that can never truly be lifted. Moreover, so long as the norms of agency and time remain anchored to the biopolitical regime of the late liberal “work ethic,” the escapist techniques described and explored in this project will continue to exhibit the raw branding of pathology’s great iron, forced so far down the social and political food chain that soon there won’t even be scraps to feed on.¹⁰⁴ I hope to have offered a different perspective on the matter. In this sense, the radical self-alterations that I have discussed in this thesis are neither pathological nor worthless, but

¹⁰⁴ Compare the repulsion endured by the addicted homeless to the reverence bestowed on Indian Sadhus – wandering ascetics – for whom extreme distortions of temporality are not only tolerated but admired. As Housner (2007:132) puts it: ‘built into renouncer philosophy is the idea that although we try to use the time that is built into nature to our benefit...the ultimate experience is to move beyond the concept of time altogether.’

rather the starting point for a particular politics (and ethics) of escape. On *Itchy Park's* benches, addiction is where control and escape converge only to immediately splinter and follow subsequently divergent trajectories; destined to meet again, over and over.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

If this thesis were a boat, its key themes would be sails. This boat would require two primary, intimately interconnected sails, *relationality* and *temporality*. The dynamic equilibrium between these two sails has ensured that no matter how rough the seas, no matter how changeable the waves, the boat has continued to move in a distinct analytical direction – towards shores where addiction is no longer reducible to an individual pathology; medical, criminal, moral or otherwise. Furthermore, these two intimately overlapping sails have been hoisted so as to catch a particular gust of wind. The zephyr of which I speak is ethnographic in both origin and force, forever propelling the thesis into and through the obvoluted waters of thought, reflection, theory, and practice. The oceanic waters in which this vessel bobs, from the waves breaking at its surface to the bed on which the anchors grip, are those of homeless addiction. In this sense, we can perhaps imagine this boat sailing along the maritime boundary between two great oceans, *The Homeless* and *The Addicted*.

Ultimately, this thesis has tried to explore the intricate, dangerous and oftentimes labyrinthine relationship between these two phenomena, approaching homeless addiction not through the pathologising lens of biomedicine – with its paradoxical corollaries of drug-court politics and exclusive inclusion – but instead through the infinitely more contingent and nuanced optics of human relationality. This thesis has therefore taken the addicted body not as a diseased body, as a being at once cursed, helpless and deviant – but rather as a relationally charged being who is always already ensnared in a web of interlocking and invariably precarious relations, relations that oscillate oftentimes wildly between the parallel bars of *presence* and *absence*, of *being* and *nonbeing*.

Furthermore, this thesis has taken the homeless addict as not only a relational being, but a *being-in-time*; a being caught in the paradoxical space between two antithetical temporal, and thus also moral regimes: drug time and late-liberal time. Differentiating

between these two (moral) temporalities – between the anaesthetic time of the blackout and the linear, future-obsessed regime of late-liberal temporality – has been at the core of my analysis, allowing me to probe the alternative bodily projects undertaken by homeless addicts for a political and ethical vein that has gone practically unnoticed amongst the other anthropological critiques surveying the topic. Significantly, whilst articulating homelessness as a human cost of late-liberal governmentality is nothing new in scholarly debate, precious little has been said in anthropological terms with regards to the existential and ethical conditions of this everyday policing; of what it is like to exist on the outskirts of the normative order, what it is like *to be at once waste and wasted*. Through the long-term intimacy of ethnography, I have tried to engage with precisely these kind of liminal realities, along with the transformative technologies and techniques that underwrite them.

Ultimately, this thesis has attempted to reveal homelessness as not just a social tragedy but an existential tragedy as well. Indeed, the narratives and life histories that form the backbone of this thesis are soaked through with the compound fractures that constitute the exhausted spaces of socio-political exclusion and abjection. Death, divorce, unemployment, eviction, humiliation, sexual abuse, incarceration, institutionalisation; these are the divergent elements of compound tragedy that converge together to form the encompassing assemblage of the homeless “situation” – a tragic set of existential conditions that are at once shared and unique. These tragic realities are constituted by an ongoing break-down that possesses a double character, a simultaneous break(ing)down of a person’s relational *and* temporal network, creating a bewilderment with time, self and world that is captured by embodied state of existential boredom; compound tragedy’s very own waiting room.

Thrown into this waiting room, forced not only to become a spectator to the violent disintegration of their most intimate relations but also to endure a sudden and ongoing dislocation from the flow of “normal” time, most of *Itchy Park*’s homeless quickly find themselves caught up in a temporality in which time is no longer spent but *killed*. In becoming existentially and ontologically bored, that is to say being thrust into a space

where time itself morphs into a kind of endlessly ravenous beast, the urban homeless more often than not find themselves encompassed by the shadow of a relentless ultimatum: *kill (time) or be killed (by time)*.

The temporal power of drugs, specifically their capacity to transform the experience of lived duration, have been laid bare in this thesis, with particular ethnographic focus on the existential complexities of the drug-induced blackout. Under these psychoactive conditions, in which the fabric connecting the temporal tenses is torn apart – where past, present, and future at once collapse, bleed into, and ossify around one another – it should come as no surprise that for the homeless, given their meagre material conditions, drugs are often the most accessible means of self-transformation; their most powerful means of *killing time*. In tandem with these intrinsic feelings of endlessness, non-productivity and non-occupation, getting stuck in the tar pits of existential boredom is constitutive of a wider relational vacuum, in which a person's most meaningful human and structural connections have been torn from them, sparking a de Martinian crisis-of-presence that provokes a radical ameliorative step: the simultaneous transcendence of boredom and the embodied effigying, or expersonation, of absent relations via the ghostly form of the blackout.

To sum up: once thrown into the alienating and marginal vacuum of homelessness, the men and women of *Itchy Park* were plagued with the uncanny return of ghostly forces from their past, encasing them in what felt like a vortex of unending mourning, a psychic prison that Freudian psychoanalysts have historically articulated as melancholy. Surrounded by the haunting and uncanny echoes of these phantasmic forces (forces brought about by the simultaneous breakdown of their most significant human, structural and temporal connections) the addict turns to drugs, hoping to kill two birds with one stone. On the one hand, the drug provides a surrogate bond that stands in for the absence of that which has been lost. No only that, it is precisely through this bond that the addict is transported into an alternative, anaesthetic temporality; one in which the traumatic memories of loss are allowed (along with their agency) to go on behind their back. This is what I mean when I claim that, by becoming somebody else through

blacking-out, the addict *expersonates* the very forces it seeks to transcend. In short, the addict must become a ghost in order to escape their ghosts.

Paradoxically though, the dissociative amnesia of the blackout means that the moment of escape is de facto inaccessible to reflexive consciousness. In this sense, rather than alleviating the melancholic spiral, drugs actually intensify and prolong it. Indeed, unable to meaningfully put these ghost-demons to bed as it were, the sheer burden of their haunting instead forces them to carve out alternative modes of being-in-the-world, even if that means living as an absence. The narcotic melancholia explored in this thesis can thus be read as an inversion of the Freudian paradigm. Rather than entombing or “cryptifying” the lost Other/love object through the sublimating fantasy of intrapsychic incorporation, I have instead argued that drugs, by virtue of their anaesthetic temporality, actually *entomb the addict* within a kind of ghostly or demonic shell. In other words, rather than living with loss, the addict instead lives *within* loss. So, rather than approaching drug abuse as way for people to bury their ghost-demons, digging a grave for it within some sub-conscious cemetery as it were, this thesis suggests that the magicality of intoxicants instead serves to preserve a connection (always torturously partial) with the lost Other by expersonating the loss through the (dis)embodied experience of blacking-out.

De Martino’s model of ritual dehistoricification (along with Napier’s concept of “selective dissociation”) provided the theoretical frameworks for thinking through the existential musculature of the drug-induced blackout; imagined here as an embodied “system of techniques” for stepping out of time and thus paradoxically recovering presence by losing the self in the timeless space of anaesthesia. Taking these theories of ritual dissociation a step further, this thesis has argued that in spaces devoid of culturally ordained healers and ontologically attuned audiences, the burden of ritualisation falls squarely on the embodied subject-in-crisis, creating a kind of auto-salvage operation where the homeless must use their foremost instrument, the body, as a transformative and ritualisable medium unto itself. Ultimately, on the streets, these DIY acts of self-transformation typically result in extensive periods of drug-fuelled anaesthesia, in the

process creating novel and imperceptible forms of bodily existence that simultaneously defy and attract the dominant trajectories of control and discipline.

Faced with the tragic and abject realities of their everyday situation, the men and women of *Itchy Park* used drugs and alcohol as a kind of embodied shortcut to transcendence, a readymade form of escape that hinged, above all, on *forgetting* themselves. No longer a synthetic agent capable of smoothing out disjunctures between past, present and future, memory was instead an umbilical cord to past traumas, a conduit for the ghostly energies that relentless haunted their daily existence. As a kind of embodied “solution” to this particular existential crisis, the blackout enabled memory and past to collapse anaesthetically in on themselves, creating a hermetically sealed present that was at once closed off from the tragedies of the past, whilst also free from the burden of the future. This is a present tense that holds no stake in the future; one that is “entered,” driven, and occupied by an alternative body-being whose perspectival boundaries are no longer constituted by the conventional interweaving of time, body and agency. In this sense, the blacked-out body is stuck not only in a particular kind of present, but is also constitutive of a radically new kind of *presence* – a somebody else.

One of my central claims is that “becoming somebody else” through blacking-out constitutes a particular “re-invention” (or obviation, in Wagner’s terms) of self. Caught somewhere between life and death, past and present, the being that emerges from the ashes of memory is neither a presence nor an absence, but rather a *present-absence*. Ultimately, approaching the blackout in this way has led me to reconceptualise it as a kind of possession trance. After all, there are few states-of-being more concerned with the dynamic imbrication of self, body and Other than possession. Taking this obviational approach enabled me to imbue the experience with the kind of relational and temporal depth so utterly lacking in the reductive accounts provided by the biomedical perspective, in which the blackout is but one “phase” along addiction’s pathological continuum.

Indeed, for the homeless addicts of *Itchy Park* the anaesthetic trance of the blackout was at once a bridge to other imperceptible ways-of-being, whilst also a drawbridge from “Other (imperceptible) beings”; human beings that had been tragically lost, the ghosts of which continued to haunt and beleaguer them. Under these conditions, where painful memories of the past compromise their ability to dwell meaningfully in the world, where ghostly forces echo continually into the present, my informants practiced the only kind of escapology they had available, raising the drawbridge and abandoning their selves into the anaesthesia of narcotic trance. As I hope to have shown, this disavowal of self occurs as a result of being *under*-connected to meaningful social bonds in the present (thereby disconnecting them from future possibilities), at the same time leaving them *over*-connected to the ghostly and demonic forces of a tragic past. Significantly, whilst these forces are “alien spirits” or “non-selves,” they are simultaneously social beings, insofar as they contain within them the tragic history of their relations with the living. It is for this reason that I have argued that the blacked-out body be thought of in “plural” terms – insofar as it is within this timeless space that the addicted self truly becomes “lost” to demonic interferences, alien spirits whose grasp develops, I claim, through the contingent entanglement of traumatic relational losses with socio-political and material abjection. This process, whereby people use drugs as a means of “dealing with their demons” only to intensify and expersonate the very demonic forces that they are trying to escape – to give them a bodily form, as it were – is captured most vividly in the case of Perry, whose ongoing attempts to use drugs as a shortcut to celestial “ascension” actually end up pushing him deeper and deeper into the very spheres of demonic interference that he is so desperate to leave behind.

On the subject of encountering ghosts, I should reveal that as part of my ethnographic follow-up work some months ago, I returned to *Itchy Park* in a bid to reconnect with some old friends and potentially fill in a few blanks, only to find that the selection of park benches that constituted the boundaries of my field site had literally been wrenched from the earth, a few contrasting shades of concrete filler the only clue that they even existed. With my primary field-site reduced to the echo of a ghostly absence, and now burdened by a profound, almost nauseating sense of the uncanny, I scoured the park for

signs of familiar faces, eventually expanding my search to the greater Whitechapel area. After circling around a few other drinking hotspots for some time, I at last stumbled upon Max and Jimmy, relieved to have found them but also urgently craving some explanation as to what had happened over at where the benches used to be. After a quick catch up, it transpired that one morning, without any kind of warning, Tower Hamlets council had swooped in and ripped up the benches, supposedly citing the park's urgent need for "modern redevelopment." The convenient fact that this particular corner of the park happened to be the long-standing social meeting-space for much of the borough's (non)resident down-and-outers was not lost on any of Jimmy, Max, or myself. As for the rest of the old crew, I was told that they were probably '*drifting about somewhere...some of them turning up from time to time, others disappearing, moving away. You know how it is.*' Faced with a field site reduced to a series of ghostly traces, and a former inner circle dispersed into a kind of phantasmal drift – *maybe there maybe not* – I found myself suddenly ensnared in a decidedly hauntological condition. After saying my farewells to Jimmy and Max, I doubled back so as to take one final sweep of the park. Standing in the space where the benches had once been, it struck me that *Itchy Park* had truly become *a haunt* of mine, in every sense of the word. As I eventually left the park, and with my own sense of time feeling very much "out of joint," it occurred to me that the writing of ethnography is also very much in the business of evoking ghosts, of cleaving open a space through which something other emerges. In other words, it seems that the "ethnographic present" is always prone to becoming a past; a past that ends up haunting the very pages on which it is eventually inscribed. In this sense, I wonder if it might be useful to think of the work of anthropology itself an anthology of ghost stories.

In any case, it seems obvious now that for the protagonists comprising this thesis, *Itchy Park* was a haunt long before the council decided to tear up the benches. At the core of this thesis then is the suggestion, ethnographically driven, that within the tragic space of homelessness, ghostly forces and drugs enjoy a symbiotic imbrication through which addicted bodies are continuously re-invented into other selves, throwing those involved into haunting "betwixt-ness" that ultimately shapes the ways that homeless people negotiate the social realities and relations that define their predicament. Like Kapferer's

Sri Lankan demons, the demonic phantoms that haunted and then possessed the homeless of *Itchy Park* should be viewed as “living” social forces.

Significantly though, the demonic forces engulfing London’s homeless addicts belong to a different ontological register from the Sri Lankan context, emerging not from the supernatural order but instead from the tragic and everyday absences that constitute the break(ing)down of homelessness; their form intrinsically more labile and partial, more similar to the internal differentiation expounded in Pedersen's ethnography of postsocialist Mongolia’s alcoholised half-shamans. Furthermore, the demonic perspective offered up in this thesis offers an alternative conceptual frame for approaching addiction’s cyclical character, allowing us to move beyond the tired and contradictory theory of the exposure model, in which addiction is viewed as an ever-increasing psychic and physical pathology. Rather than viewing drug use as conditioned by prior usage, I have approached drug consumption as a transformative moment that is constituted by a particular paradox:

With nobody available to exorcise the demonic phantoms that make up their everyday reality, the addict turns to drugs and instead “auto-exorcises” himself. As a result, this escapist need to “take one’s self out of it” is caught up in the transformative mechanics of drug-surrogacy, in which the relational loss, rather than being recovered, is instead swallowed into the drug-relationship; thereby creating an embodied bond between drug, self and loss that radically reconfigures how this loss is both lived and experienced. In other words, rather than exorcising the demon(s), drug-surrogacy expersonates the demon into existence through a kind of mutual co-genesis in which demon and drug extend metastatically into other another.

Ironically then, it is precisely through the addict’s attempt at auto-exorcism that they create the very demon that comes to possess them; the blacked-out body forming the host site for this complex “tripled-up” process – where the addict is at once victim, exorcist and demon. By conceptualising addiction in this *relational* manner, whilst at the same time acknowledging the eclipsical perspectivism intrinsic to the *temporality* of the

blackout, we can start to recover “the vicious cycle’s” human character, in which “becoming somebody else” can be both prison and escape route.

In articulating the homeless-addicted body as simultaneously “tripled-up” and yet always partially connected, this thesis has located homeless-addicted being at a highly precarious point along the political continuum, as the “loose ends” that fray at the outskirts of late-liberal statehood. The homeless-addicted body is thus always already a political body, an assemblage of corporeal affects and embodied ontological points-of-view that captures and contains the “political magic” of London under late-liberalism. Furthermore, in a bid to peel back the complex layering of this socio-political precarity, I have chosen to extend the investigation by viewing addiction through the overlapping prisms of ethics and performativity, conceptualising drugs as particular technology of embodied escape that carries with it its own unique set of existential tensions.

Ultimately, this theoretical move towards exploring the ethical, political and performative potential of the addicted body has been pursued as a deliberate attempt to extend the anthropological conversation on homeless addiction beyond the seminal thoughts offered up first by Desjarlais and later by Bourgois & Schonberg: to show how the homeless body is not only a technical instrument and an lumpen absorber of abusive political shockwaves, but also a powerful politico-ontological transformer in its own right. In delving deeper into the existential peculiarities of intoxicated states-of-being, such as the drug-induced blackout, this thesis has tried to make an original contribution to the existing literature on homeless addiction, shedding much needed light on how the (dis)entanglement of intimate relationships, moral institutions, psychopathology, medicine, and temporality works, if not to create the addict him/herself, then to shape the socio-political realities that give the addict its form in contemporary urban space, in the process exploring not only how these various enmeshments impose values onto the experience of addiction, but also how the addicted “state” serves ethical possibilities as well as mediating the marginality of the homeless condition. Furthermore, it is worth re-emphasising here that at no point do I suggest that addictive pursuits do not impose huge costs on the bodyminds of those who seek them out. The point I am trying to make is

that ethnography can play a crucial part in helping us rethink the taken-for-granted legitimacy of the biomedical/pathological model within these spaces, offering new insights into the concrete realities of lives that are marked as deviant, diseased, and corrupt. In this sense, this thesis is part of a wider ethical challenge invoked by João Biehl, of the need for ethnography to help bring these bracketed and forgotten social forms “out of thoughtlessness.”

In taking the body as the homeless addict’s primary ethical instrument, I have been careful to situate these narcotic self-operations as taking place within a dominant moral order that presumes such practices to be at once medically and socially pathological. In cutting against the grain of society’s top-down moral codes, certain techniques of self-transformation employed by the homeless – such as self-harm and public drug-taking – can therefore be described as at once ethical and abjectifying. Indeed, by utilising the body as an instrument of escape – epitomised by the Sartrean notion of “exploring the wound with the knife” – the very techniques of body and self that fulfil an ethical function simultaneously demarcate the same bodily projects as abject and unliveable. Drugs then, as a kind of ethical-abject have the capacity to provoke in its user a particular kind of moral torment, in which a person ends up catalysing their own marginality through the very adaptive practices that are intended to mitigate it. This double-bind is fuelled and constituted by a number of overlapping social and political prescriptions that brings into play a set of disciplinary controls whereby the addict is at once abjected and absorbed by those above them in the societal food chain.

Trapped within the living nightmare of homelessness, I have ethnographically shown how the abjectified addict comes to experience the limits of their ethical operations as a kind of cracking-up, as the ongoing incorporation of life’s compound tragedies into the body’s existential musculature; the track marks, the scars, *the infamous self-destruction*. However, in a bid to escape the Deleuzian prophecy, namely that the drug-addled body is destined to become a burst body or a botched job, I have put forward an alternative interpretive framework, one that conceptualises the addicted body as a kind of living, breathing *political body-art*. Using the framework of Adorno’s negative dialectics as a

starting point, I have suggested that we might, as a kind of thought experiment, consider the embodied performativity of homeless intoxication – its “transformance” – as a avant-garde work of art. Buttressed by Haraway’s theory of cyborg ontology in conjunction with Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of the grotesque, I have taken the liminal form of the blacked-out body as a radical and embodied vista into social and political realities that otherwise remain obscured by “normative” ideological conventions of temporal and bodily discipline.

In this way, the conception of art put forward in this thesis bears certain similarities to the Nietzschean view of art, as something that is always set against the everyday structures of a given lifeworld. Approached via Adorno and Deleuze as simultaneously artist and artwork, the blacked-out body does not make visible the power of the artist’s subjective interpretation of the world, but rather it forces us – the co-opted audience – to reckon with our most taken-for-granted, concealed everyday conduct, the processes by which we reify the world and thus make ourselves self-evident within it. As the avant-garde escape-artists of the modern cityscape, the homeless addicts of *Itchy Park* make visible spaces where the world resists its own representation, in the process “denaturalising” the axiomatic boundaries of the everyday. Furthermore, the body-as-artwork calls itself into existence through the “(a)liveness” of its transformance; a public and hyper-present encounter that is endowed with a particular kind of political affectivity, one that intrinsically reveals and parodies the historically specific consequences of late-liberalism, along with a multitude of its hidden terrors.

Analysed in this thesis as the embodied eversion of the dominant chronopolitical regime, the blackout has no time for either the past or future. With the immediate past no longer a viable reflexive currency, the “ever-tillable future” of late-liberal capitalism is no longer investable, subverting the dominant temporal economy beneath the weight of its own liminal grotesquery. In this sense, the addicted bodies of *Itchy Park* can, like all ethnographic texts, be approached as a kind of living medium; a lens that allows us to explore the ways in which human being takes shape under different social, political and

material pressures, along with the divergent and invariably messy existential forms and practices that arise from these projects.

As an embodied moment of escape from the realities of their own bare-life, this thesis has demonstrated that the narcotic temporality of the blacked-out body is at once antithetical and (partially) antidotal to the regime of post-disciplinary time. The intoxicated transformances enacted by the residents of *Itchy Park* are ultimately non-reproductive, lying well outside the logic of containment and copying. As such, these performative technologies of anaesthesia constitute a body politic that is grotesquely out of sync with the engine of reproductive representation that constitutes the normal flow of capital.

As an alternative bodily project that operates beyond the reproductive machinery of capitalism, addicted transformances bring on themselves what economists would call an “opportunity cost” – the “cost” being the social pathologies and condemnations that the homeless incur for not “choosing” the “normal” alternatives of productivity and occupation. At a broader level then, the distinction of what constitutes a “valuable” use of one’s time is intimately related to this concept of opportunity cost, insofar as the option that gets ignored or abnegated effectively provides the moral and economic yardstick against which a person’s temporal “choices” are measured. In short, time is not only money, but also a currency unto itself, itself evaluated in relation to other uses of time. Drug-time, then, is in economic terms, an opportunity wasted, insofar as this use of time is not available for “productive” use.

In the midst of the drug-induced blackout, time is not so much used as *killed* through the enactment of a non-profit bodily state; a state that operates within a psychosomatic black-market, itself constituted through an alternative experience of lived duration. It is under these conditions, when past and future are simultaneously obliterated by the abysmal slide into anaesthetic possession, that the labile and “impossible” silhouettes of urban abandonment take shape, their ductile and incomplete form emerging from the isomeric enmeshment between the invisible power of demonic phantoms and the opaque

forces of the market. As distinct ontological conditions in their own right, this thesis has argued that the demonic realities and temporal distortions brought about by drugs should be viewed as part of a wider constellation of interlocking relations; relations social, political, historical, material and embodied.

For many of the urban homeless, drugs are not just a “part of life,” but an ongoing part of their lived experience as human beings. This is an important distinction. Approaching the lived experience of drug-taking from an existential perspective prevents us from taking the conservative analytical approach, i.e. of paying attention to the encompassing frame in which intoxication occurs whilst conveniently (and conservatively) glossing over the existential and perspectival realities of the embodied state itself. In this way, periods of extreme intoxication, such as the blackout, need not be seen as an anthropologically or philosophically empty space. This tendency to turn-a-blind-eye comes, I think, at least in part from the fact that the vocabulary we currently employ when discussing subversive and non-conventional forms of experience, such as addiction, is overwhelmingly tethered to “rationalist” discourses that continually frame, describe and diagnose such experiences as pathological or deviant.

We would do well to fight these tendencies, to consider instead that *being wasted* opens up an opportunity for anthropological analysis that both enriches our understanding not only of modern politics, but of time (and the body in time) as well. Indeed, to lose oneself in the oblivion of the blackout is as much an act of creative transformation as it is one of destructive negation. It is a period of temporal suspension and agentive transition that Lola Ferrari knew only too well. Of course, for Ms Ferrari the surgical nature of her anaesthesia was both totalising and immediate, markedly distinct from the incomplete and processual anaesthesia of narcotic intoxication. The difference being that for the former, the lights are very much out, whereas for the latter they remain on, *just with somebody else at home*. Although these black holes differ in form and volume, their relative seduction may well enjoy a shared origin: namely the deep existential need to suspend subjective existence and hurdle the wall of self. In short, to transform.

To explore a person's chosen descent into the netherworld of narcotic oblivion in terms of moral equations is to miss the point by some distance. The point – the bullseye moment – is that these technologies of anaesthesia reveal the very boundaries of consciousness itself. Indeed, I hope to have shown that the internally differentiated, avant-garde bodies that form the chaotic sphere of *Itchy Park* can no longer be understood through stereotypes pertaining to the “selfish” and “deviant” behaviour of the vagrant or junkie. Rather their labile and paradoxical form can reveal to us something about narcotic consciousness as an ethical, political and performative experience, and, on top of that, about how respite from the world can be derived through the disavowal of time, agency and self as well as from their control and discipline.

As I hope to have demonstrated throughout this project, a person's means of self-transformation develop through manifold political, social, historical and material pressures, the consequence of which are often incomplete and partial selves that are fraught with existential tension and paradox. This does not mean that such selves are somehow “unmade,” rather they simply march to the beat of a very different ontological drum.

As a final *post scriptum*, I would point out that the relational-temporal theory of addiction posited in this thesis emerged specifically from my immersion into the tragic sphere of homelessness. The reality, of course, is that the homeless do not have a monopoly on addictive conduct. Indeed, the number of people seeking treatment for drug and alcohol addiction across all sections of society in the UK, Europe and the United States has been steadily rising for some time now. In this sense, it is perhaps worthwhile pointing out that a person does not need to be homeless to feel alienated. Indeed, if we momentarily situate addiction within the current epidemic of mental illness plaguing the modern West, within the huge spikes in stress and anxiety, depression, self-harm, eating disorders, body dysmorphia to name but a select few,¹⁰⁵ perhaps we can start asking not what sets these conditions apart, but what they have in

¹⁰⁵ Consider for example the fact that suicide is the single biggest killer of men aged under 45 in the UK. Indeed, sharp rises in suicide rates (particularly among middle aged men) are being experienced across the Western world.

common. The answer, I tentatively suggest, is that all these conditions are borne of a world in which human beings, those social beings *par excellence*, are being pulled apart from each other like never before. Thrown into a market society where competition and individualism reign supreme, where increasingly everything is up for sale, where social media creates vacuous echoscapes that deceptively mirror your own thoughts straight back to you, where alternative ways of being/imagining are in dangerously short supply, the profound intimacy of human-human connection is increasingly hard to come by. As such, we can perhaps plot *Itchy Park's* addicted homeless as one point along an ever increasing continuum of loneliness and alienation, the idea being that their tragic struggles are symptomatic of a wider struggle at the level of society, a struggle to cope with the synaesthetic overload of late-modernity, one that is increasingly mediated through the ever-increasing spectrum of anaesthetic technologies. With a hopeful look to further ethnographic investigations in the future, I wonder if a relational-temporal approach to addiction might be a consistently more fruitful analytical approach than the absolutist dogma of the pathology model; be it the “weekend warrior” who ploughs through a potent cocktail of booze and cocaine every Friday night in order to “get over” the working week, the pop star who can’t take the pressures of fame and goes “off the rails,” the bored suburban housewife who generously mixes prescription medication and chardonnay as a means of coping with the banality of existence, or even the university student who drinks herself into oblivion on a nightly basis in order to “come out of her shell.” Ultimately, what makes drugs so existentially appealing, I think, especially in times of such untold social isolation, is their capacity to simultaneously transform the boundaries of time and selfhood, to create spaces for being and dwelling in which you really can become another self; even if only for a little while, and at great personal cost.

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